

THE
WOMAN OF LETTERS;
OR, THE
History of Miss FANNY BELTON.

V O L. II.

Samuel Smith Brop

Vol. 2

T H E
W O M A N O F L E T T E R S ;
O R , T H E
H i s t o r y o f M i s s F A N N Y B E L T O N .

I N T W O V O L U M E S .

V O L . I I .

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THE
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LETTER XVI.

London, May 17.

AT length, my friend, I am arriv'd in safety at this vast metropolis.—To one bred in the very abode of *simplicity* itself, you will imagine my astonishment at the hurry, noise, and variety of objects which on all sides presented themselves to my wondering view. The stage coach drove to its inn, from whence I took a hackney coach,

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with

with my small luggage, and order'd the coachman to drive me to Jermyn-street, Piccadilly, to a Mrs. Bennet, a milliner, agreeable to my aunt's direction. It was a long way, as the stage coach had put up in the city.—But during this ride to the milliner's, I made many reflections on my own most helpless situation, when I saw, in passing the great streets, the various and numberless active beings with which they were crowded on all sides.

“ These industrious, busy people, said I to myself, have all homes to go to:—they have all, doubtless, relations and friends to welcome them;—whilst I, alas!—like a link separated from the general chain, have no one on earth to receive me!—no place where even to lay my wretched head!—no parent, nor even common acquaintance to protect me!”

At

At length the coach arriv'd in Jermy-n-street.—The driver of it enquir'd at several houses for Mrs. Bennet, a milliner, but no such person was to be found.

My God! said I, what am I now to do?

“Where, mistress,” said the coachman, “would you be drove to.—Come say where—I cannot stop at so many houses indeed.”

I thought the fellow look'd insolent. It was absolutely necessary I must get a lodging somewhere, as the evening was coming on. We were then in the same street, directly opposite a linnen-draper's shop, and the master of it was standing at his door.—I begg'd he would step to the coach, when I ask'd him if he knew where a Mrs. Bennet, a milliner, liv'd in that street?—He replied, with great civility,—“The person, Madam, you enquire for, has been

dead above two years.—(Ah ! thought I, my wicked aunt!)—She liv'd in the very next house to mine, and my wife was her most intimate friend.”

“ Pray Sir,” said I, “ can I see your wife ? ” — “ Certainly,” — he replied, and he instantly sent her to me.

I told her, as briefly as I could, that I was recommended to Mrs. Bennet, that I was not able to express the greatness of my disappointment to hear of her death, and desir'd she would recommend me to a lodging. The amiable woman look'd on me with great attention, (whilst I fancy my eyes seem'd to implore her protection) and with civility she said, — “ *We* lett lodgings :—but my first floor is occupied, and I have only a small back bed-chamber at liberty up two pair of stairs.”

“ O, Madam,” said I, “ that will do extremely well.—I am just come
off

off a long journey, and cannot seek farther."

"You need not," replied she, "we will endeavour to accommodate you to your satisfaction."—On her so saying, I alighted, and she led me into a parlour, where she was going to drink tea.

"Come," said she, "sit down—you seem fatigu'd:—you shall drink a dish of tea with us, whilst your room is getting ready."

During our little refreshment, this humane woman behav'd with such unaffected civility, and even kindness, that I could not help shedding tears.—The idea of my wretched state,—the disappointment of finding the person was no more, to whom I had been recommended,—and the being, as I may say, utterly destitute of all support, except a few guineas in my pocket,—all together struck me with inconceivable anguish.

“Come”—said Mrs. Williams, for so is my kind landlady call’d,—“come, be chearful (she imagining my tears proceeded for the death of Mrs. Bennet)—I knew the good woman intimately well, to whom you was recommended; she was my next door neighbour for near twenty years, and died in my arms.”

“As you were so long acquainted, Madam,” said I, “you have doubtless heard her mention being related to a Mr. Grimston, of —shire.”

“That I have” she replied, “very frequently: nay, I have seen that gentleman often at her house.—I remember him well.”

I then inform’d her, he had married my aunt,—that I was the daughter of a clergyman,—was left in distressed circumstances,—and I was now come to London to get into some way of employment by the advice of my aunt and uncle.—

Saying

Saying which, as a testimony of my truth in this matter, I produced the letter I had in my pocket, which I begg'd her to read.—I thought I ow'd this to her kindness. After she had perused it,—“Well,” said she, “make yourself easy:—I assure you I will do what I can for you.—We have an exceeding good lady lodges in our first floor, and she possibly may know some family that would be glad of such a person.—I will speak to her to-morrow about you.—I wish she would take you herself for her companion, but, poor lady, I fear she is not long for this world:—she is in a deep decline, I doubt.”

How different, my dear, is the behaviour of good Mrs. Williams, to the fordid Mrs. P—, at W——? you see the knowledge of my being in distressed circumstances no way less'n'd her civilities: she attended me

herself to my little room, which I like much.—She has just taken her leave of me for the night.—I could not rest till I had scribbled thus far to the friend of my heart.

O my Lucy, how could my aunt have the *cruelty*, I must call it, to send me such a journey, to a person whom she knew not was *in being* or *not*?—Or perhaps, what is still worse, knew her relation was actually dead, but thought her scheme a good one of getting rid of me at once.—How careful ought the relations, or guardians, of such poor young creatures as myself, to be to whom they entrust their charge, when launching into the world! and how many destitute, helpless girls may be ruin'd, by such an accident as this of mine!—How thankful am I to Providence for conducting me to my present situation!—It is, I doubt not, for the best:—nay better, perhaps, than if I
really

really had been engaged to Mrs. Bennet:—for, alas! you know, my dear, I have no sort of skill at my needle:—I have no kind of genius *that* way:—my whole education, you know, has been of a different kind: it is by my *pen*, and not by my *needle*, that I must get my livelihood.

Bless me, my Lucy, I have been looking over my very small stock of finances, and find the expences of my journey has diminish'd my small sum to four guineas!—What will that do in London?—But let me be thankful that I am here in safety, and trust to that kind hand, whose chiefest care is helpless innocence.

I have had a comfortable night's rest, after my long journey;—and have the pleasure to find Mrs. Williams has been as good as her word, in speaking of me to the Lady on her first floor. Her name is Barlow, and I understand she is one of

those excellent people, who make it the business of their lives to assist the distressed, though I find her fortune is but moderate.

I was much affected to day by the following scene of wretchedness. To lead to my account of it, I should first say, that at dinner (for I have made an agreement to dine below upon reasonable terms) Mrs. Williams, who rises in my esteem every moment, said to her maid—"Do you know, Peggy, how that poor soul does in the little green garret?—Here—carry this bit of pudding to her—perhaps she may eat it;—if not, the children will."

"Aye, poor things," said the maid, "they will be glad of it.—I don't think they have had any thing since what you sent last.—I never go by the door, but that pretty little boy, the eldest of the children, runs out to ask if I have got any thing for him?"

him?—for I often buy a cake and give him.”

Poor things! (said Mrs. Williams, a tear glistening in her eye)—I wish their miserable mother would not confine herself so closely to her little employment. — Indeed she is the image of industry itself.—Good Heaven! to see the poor wretch sit with such patient resignation at her work, —earning bread for her little ones, day after day, and under the pressure of such a painful disorder, such a shocking, incurable malady,—is, indeed, most pitiable!”

My heart, you know, my Lucy, is ever open to a tale of woe.—I heard the above sad story with great attention and pity.

“Pray, madam,” said I, “what is her disorder?”

“A cancer in her breast,” she replied, “a confirm’d cancer,—which must inevitably be her end in a very

few months.—But her fortitude, her resignation is beyond imagination; and were it not for the supports of religion, she never, I am convinced, could endure what she does.—I call'd into her room yesterday morning, and for the first time saw her weeping.”—“I am ashamed of these tears, Madam,” (said she, forcing a sweet languid smile) “but my little Billy, here, has been telling me I shall not die.”—“No, my poor mamma shall not die—shall she, Mrs. Williams,” (said the pretty fellow) “for what shall such a little baby, as sister Sally do, and I do, without her?”

The wretched mother cast her eyes to heaven! and with a silent, earnest address, seem'd to implore its aid for her precious children.—“When I am gone,” said she, “my dear, you will have a *friend* that will
never

never forsake you.”—“ But shall I *indeed* ?”—said the sweet innocent.

“ Heavens !” said I, “ good madam, who, or what is this poor woman ?—Is she young ?”

“ By what I can find,” she replied, “ she has been genteely bred, and well-educated ; but unfortunately has highly disoblig’d her friends by marriage.—Her husband, I understand, is a most vile wretch, and has left her absolutely to starve with these poor children — the youngest not a year old.—The brutality of her husband has been the cause of this dreadful malady in her breast ; a cruel blow occasioned it.”

Good Mrs. Barlow has had a surgeon sent for to look at the cancer, whose opinion is, it is absolutely incurable. He says, she may languish on a few months longer, and *that’s* the utmost that can be expected.

Poor

Poor young creature! She is, it seems, about twenty-two years of age.

“ Think, Miss Belton,” continued Mrs. Williams, “ what must be the amazing industry of this unhappy woman, who, in the midst of the most excruciating pains of this shocking disease, yet endeavours to support her little ones by the labour of her hands! her ingenious employment is making artificial flowers, which she sells to the shops.—On her first coming to my house, now two months since, she used to crawl out herself to dispose of them, but now, as her disease is daily getting ground, she is not able.

“ O Heavens !” said I, “ what distress ?” — Mrs. Williams continued.

“ I have dispos’d of a few flowers for her amongst my friends.—Look at this bunch of jasmine, (opening a drawer)

drawer) is it not extremely natural, and prettily fancied?"

I was delighted with its elegance. — "O Mrs. Williams," said I, "pray let me see this wretched woman, my heart bleeds for her."

"Well," replied she, "in the afternoon we will call upon her.—I will get some cakes to carry to the children."

I retir'd soon after to my room, and wrote thus far.

Ah! my Lucy, what are my difficulties—what are my distresses—compar'd to those of this miserable woman!—what a lesson of industry, of patience is here before me!—I am asham'd Lucy, of myself.—What! shall your Fanny, blest with health, strength, and youth, dare to complain,—dare to repine one moment at her condition?—No—gracious Power divine, never will I murmur at thy allotments!

"Thou great Intelligence Supreme,
 "Sov'reign Director of this mighty frame,
 "Whose watchful hand, and all-observing ken,
 "Fashions the hearts, and views the ways of
 "men,
 "Whether thy hand, the plenteous table spread,
 "Or measure sparingly, my daily bread;
 "Whether or wealth, or honours gild the scene,
 "Or wants deform, and wasting anguish stain,
 "On *Thee*, with *patience firm* I will rely,
 "Bless'd in the care of thy approving eye."

BOYCE.

Mrs. William's knocks at my door
to go to this poor woman.

* * * * *

What a scene have I just been
witness to!—I can say with Shakes-
pear's Miranda, "that the *very vir-*
tue of compassion, is awaken'd in my
breast."

My good landlady and I have been
to see the above-mention'd poor in-
dustrious wretch. On our entering
her little garret, Mrs. Williams said,
"I have brought you, Mrs. Perry,
a young

a young lady to look at your ingenious manufactory." I turn'd my head and saw, sitting up in her bed, supported by bolsters, an amiable young woman—pale—and emaciated. — "Want, *staring* in her haggard eye;"—busily employ'd in making a very beautiful carnation.—On one side, on a small pillow, lay, in a sweet sleep, a little infant,—and on the other, a bible,—and before her stood a large band-box, with a great variety of curious artificial flowers. "How do you to day," (ask'd Mrs. Williams) "are you a little easier than you was yesterday?"

"I thank heaven," answer'd the patient sufferer, "I have had a tolerable night for *me*, madam"—looking up with a sweet smile.

I could not stand this affecting scene without tears; to hide which, I caught up a lovely little boy, about three years old, who was playing by
the

the bed-side, and ran with him to the window.

“You see,” continued she, “I have the *blessing* of having my hands still able to do something.”

I turn’d round (having wiped my eyes) and began admiring her ingenious works, out of which I selected a beautiful rose-bud, and a bunch of myrtle.—These I purchas’d to present to my dear Lucy, if I am ever so happy as to see her again.

I told Mrs. Perry she was the image of industry.—“Aye (said Mrs. Williams) and of every other virtue too—what patience in particular—”

“I am reconcil’d to my sufferings,” interrupted she.—“To be sure, having always liv’d in affluence,—poverty seem’d strange to me at first;—but I am now persuaded, that poverty is not the greatest calamity.—I trust, whatever my lot in this life may be, my resignation will be equal to it.—It
is

is here," said she, taking up her bible,—“ it is here, I have learn'd those sacred truths, that enable me to encounter my sorrows.—And I can now say with the royal Psalmist, “ It is *good* for me that I have been in *trouble*, that I may learn thy statutes.”

O my dear, what a woman is this!

Mrs. Williams being call'd out of the room on some particular affair, I was left alone with this poor sufferer.—What would I have given to have heard her little history *!—but I check'd my curiosity,—as I fear'd it would be the means of reviving in her wounded heart the most painful sensations of bitter remembrance of former happy days :—and observing she appear'd faint, as from fatigue of

* Which the reader may possibly think worthy of attention : but it is not mentioned. Indeed it is a common fault in writers of this kind, to crowd their stories of distress too *thick* on each other. Our poor heroine *herself*, will, in due time, claim the tribute perhaps of a tear from the reader.

talking,

talking, I thought it best to retire. Before I did so, however, I slipp'd a crown into her emaciated hand.—“Accept this trifle,” said I, “from one who is *poor* herself.—Heaven comfort you.”—She thank'd me with her tears—*mine* would flow;—and I hurried out of the room as fast as I could.

O my friend, I will endeavour to profit by the virtues of this poor sufferer.—Adieu,—ever your

F. B.

L E T T E R XVII.

May 22.

SINCE my last epistle to my Lucy, I have been introduced to the good lady who lodges in the first floor of Mrs. Williams.—I am charm'd with her, and her excellent character. Her life, it seems, (though her fortune is but moderate) is one continued scene

scene of benevolence. What a *dignity* does innate goodness give to its possessor!—and yet, what an amiable *humility* appears throughout the whole behaviour of the good Mrs. Barlow!—That is the name of this excellent woman.

Mrs. Williams had inform'd her of my little story, and, two days ago, she desired we would both drink tea with her. I cannot express how much I am struck with esteem and pity for this kind lady.—*Esteem* for her humanity, which seems the first principle of her generous heart;—and *pity* to see such evident marks in her health of a deep decline.—She talks of dying with the same composure as most other people talk of going to sleep.

She appears turn'd of fifty, the widow I find of a man as eminent for piety as herself. As she had heard I was a person in distress, *that* seem'd a sufficient recommendation with her,
for

for desiring to see me.—She was too delicate to dwell on the particulars of my misfortunes;—and assured me she would do her utmost to enquire among her numerous acquaintance, for some easy, advantageous station that would suit me.

I am this moment call'd away from my pen; the above-mentioned kind Lady, desiring to see me immediately, as she has good tidings to impart.

* * * * *

I am return'd from Mrs. Barlow, my dear, but I am sorry to tell you, mortified and dejected.—Not from her behaviour, for she is the kindest, best of women, but from the circumstance of my having been educated in such a manner (a circumstance which never struck me so forcible before) as I fear I shall not be able to procure a livelihood in the common occupations of life.—But I will tell you
what

what part in my conversation with this sensible, kind woman.

She receiv'd me with great cordiality, and with a beam of pleasure in her languid eye. She said, taking my hand,—“ I am happy to tell you, Miss Belton, that I have been so fortunate, since I saw you, to have enquir'd among my acquaintance, about some business for you, and have exceeded beyond my most sanguine hopes.—But sit down, and I will tell you all.”

I was, you may be sure, Lucy, full of my acknowledgments of gratitude.

“ In the first place,” said this kind friend, “ I hear Mrs. Worthy, who keeps a great boarding-school at Hampstead for young ladies, wants a young person to teach needle-work, in its various branches.—She is so good a woman, and her terms are so advantageous, that I think you could
not

not be better situated.—What say you, my dear ?”

Alas ! Lucy, you know I am ignorant of every branch of fine needle work !

“ Madam,” said I, “ I fear—I— I should not be equal to this task.— Without I had skill in those works requir’d, I would not undertake—”

“ Well,” said she, “ if you are not conversant with *very* curious needle-work, as Dresden, &c. you can have no objection, I imagine, to be fix’d at the great shop, or rather warehouse, in Pall-mall, where hats, bonnets, cloaks, &c. are made up to sell wholesale ; and where they at present want another hand, to whom, I find, they would at once agree for a guinea a week.—

Lucy, I have no more *idea* of making hats and bonnets, than I have of making a joint-stool.—In fact, my
poor

poor old Martha us'd to do all our needle-work.

I hung my head—I could not answer.—Mrs. Barlow continu'd.

“ Or what do you think, my dear child, of the following scheme?—A lady of my acquaintance wants a large assortment of *netting*; as purses, hoods, handkerchiefs, &c. to send to the East-Indies, to a milliner at Calcutta; and for which she will readily give any person a guinea and half a week, till the whole quantity of netting she requires is finish'd.—Or should you rather choose *knitting*? In the sole article of knitting gloves, you may earn a very comfortable subsistence.—Or, though you do not understand the muslin works now in fashion, I imagine you know something of embroidery.—I could recommend you to a very genteel constant employment in that branch—or to the tambour work.—You

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certainly, my dear, I really take it for granted, must be conversant with some of these female employments, as Mrs. Williams informs me, you have had an excellent education."

I now, Lucy, for the first time, lifted up my humble eyes from the carpet, on which they had been fix'd, and looking on Mrs. Barlow, with a dejected air,—“ Alas! Madam, I am so unfortunate, as to be unacquainted with all the particulars you have mentioned.—I know nothing of netting, knitting, embroidery, or the tambour, or in short, of any kind of female manufactory."

“ You amaze me”—said Mrs. Barlow—“ I thought (she continued with quickness) you was to have been a milliner at Mrs. Bennet's.

“ True, Madam,” returned I, “ but I must have passed through a long service to the business, before I could have been of any use. You heard, and truly

truly heard, good Madam, that I had an excellent education:—indeed, I fear, if I may be allowd the expref-
fion, it was too excellent for this fashionable world. I had the mis-
fortune to lofe my mother, at a very early period of my life.—My father was a clergyman, a man of uncommon learning, and exemplary morals.—He lov'd me to excefs:—I was his only child, the darling of his foul. Having no fon, in fact he gave me the education of a *fon*; I had a natural tafte or genius for learning; I *liv'd* in my dear father's library at the age of fix, and inftead of playing with my dolls, I was by my own choice, and to my great delight, fhut up among his books, poring over fome folio.—He call'd me his little librarian, and at the age of twelve years, I was as well acquainted with every book in his ftudy, as his moft fan-
guine wifhes could expect.—The

classical languages were my delight:—Homer and Virgil, my chief companions;—together with Aristotle, Epictetus, Plato, &c. Ancient poetry was my sublimest joy.—By the time I was fourteen years old, I had written a great number of pieces both in prose and verse, in the Latin and Greek languages.” (Mrs. Barlow, my Lucy, look’d amaz’d.) “My genius was thought to be extensive, and my progress in learning has been as great as my application was indefatigable. I never lov’d my needle—my whole soul was absorb’d in learning, and in imbibing those excellent morals of that best of men, that dear parent, now a saint in Heaven.”

“My poor child,” rejoin’d Mrs. Barlow, “I make no doubt but that your genius and learning are great:—but I fear that understanding you possess in so great a degree, (she was pleas’d to say) has not been directed

or

or applied to, what this world calls, a *useful* purpose.—By what I can find, you can do no one thing of *use* to yourself, or to any person living.—Could you work with quickness and facility at your needle; did you understand knitting, netting, embroidery, or a thousand other little works of industry, by which millions daily maintain themselves with comfort, I should have infinite satisfaction. In supplying the wants, occasions, or superfluities of others, you would not be under the dreadful idea of *poverty*, in the most wealthy, populous city on earth.—My own fortune is very moderate:—would it were in my power to assist you!—Indeed, my dear,” continued this charming woman, “I earnestly wish and entreat you to fix on some industrious employment, that will enable you to earn a *certain* subsistence,—and at the same time make you an *useful* mem-

ber of the community.—The busy bee, my dear child, is a *little* insect, but of infinite service.—What a lesson does she set us!—never idle—employing every moment to some *useful* purpose. The learned languages, for aught I know, and doubtless *have*, many beauties, but I am ignorant of them; for I confess I am satisfied with reading and studying our best English authors.—And believe me, my dear child, it is not *speculative science* that can, as things are constituted in this present state, make any part of the wealth of this world:—no—it is *industry* alone, employ'd on articles that are useful and beneficial to society, that constitutes the true riches of all mankind.”

“ Believe me, dearest Madam,” said I, “ there is nothing I would not undertake, of which I had any *knowledge*, to gain an innocent livelihood.—I would write,—I would
translate

translate for the booksellers,—I would—”

“ Ah! my dear” — interrupting me, and shaking her head — “ I fear that would be a very precarious subsistence! — But don’t be dejected, we will think of something.”

I caught her hand, and press’d it to my lips.

“ Come to me to-morrow, my poor child, I desire,” — said she, — “ for believe me I heartily wish to see you in some way of employment. — A young person so helpless, — so inexperienced in the ways of life, is a sad misfortune indeed!”

Her physician then entering, I was oblig’d to take my leave.

I retired, my Lucy, dejected — confounded — and have been scribbling thus far to you. — I almost wish my dear partial father had not bestow’d such extraordinary pains in the instructing me in the learned languages.

—I thought Mrs. Barlow talk'd very sensibly on the subject.—Perhaps, after all my Latin and Greek, it would have been more advantageous to your poor Fanny, to have been bred to the spinning wheel;—to have been, at this moment, knitting stockings, or even weaving a cabbage net.—I should not then, at this instant, have been reduced to the worst sort of beggary, (I may call it) that of begging with sound limbs, and a sensible mind;—the least pitied, though in reality, perhaps the most *pitiable* of all the creation; for surely that is the case of a *poor gentlewoman*.

* * * * *

Wednesday.

You may believe, my friend, I did not forget Mrs. Barlow's kind request, of seeing me this day.—I am much rejoiced to say, that humane, truly good woman, insists on my
living

living entirely with her, till she can hear of something for me.—Is not this kind?—She has order'd a little bed to be put up in her own apartment for me:—and has allotted a closet near her own, for my particular use.—In short, I am going at present to be happily situated;—at least I am to remain with this excellent woman for some time.—Indeed this is lucky for me, as my small purse is almost exhausted.

* * * * *

Monday.

My present situation is so agreeable, I can hardly believe it *real*. I spend my hours in reading to my kind friend, and in shewing her all the little productions of my pen.

“ Though I don't understand Latin and Greek,” said she this morning to me, “ yet I am very fond of works of genius, particularly

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poetry.

poetry.—But then, Fanny, (smiling) I must not have you entirely *neglect* your *needle*.—Come, you shall read your tragedy to me.”—It is now, my Lucy, nearly finish’d.—I did so,—and she was pleas’d to bestow on it what Thomson calls,

“ The noblest praise of tears.”

Just after I had finish’d reading the above performance, and was sitting with all my writings about me, —and Homer laying by me, (out of which author I had been translating some passages) a relation arriv’d to see Mrs. Barlow, out of Wiltshire. When his name was announced, “ Now Fanny (said the dear woman) you may shine in your *own* way.—Here comes a gentleman as *bookish* as yourself.”

A good-looking clergyman now enter’d, and after the usual compliments, and some common conversation

tion

tion had pass'd, he took up my volume of Homer.—He started, exclaiming, — “ Good Heavens ! Greek !

I blush'd—Mrs. Barlow smil'd.

She then told him my whole little history, and desir'd his assistance : “ in case (added the dear woman) a certain event should happen, which my declining state, every day, warns me will soon come to pass.”

Mr. Barlow now enter'd into a literary conversation with your Fanny. —He was pleas'd to express his surprise.—We soon fell into a dissertation on epic poetry,—which lasted full two hours.

“ Mighty well, good folks,” said Mrs. Barlow, “ you have it all to yourselves.—In good truth, you are both so very learned and sublime, I cannot put in a word.”

“ I am amaz'd (said this gentleman, who has great learning and

genius—but my heart is safe, my dear, he being an old married man) —Will you favour me, Miss, with a sight of some of your writings?" —After looking slightly over a few of them,—“Will you give me leave to take them to my lodgings, that I may peruse them at my leisure?"

“You do me great honour, Sir,” said I.

“Why cousin, if you could part with this young lady, what would my neighbour in Wiltshire, Mrs. Welwood, give for such a companion!—you know her whole soul is absorbed in literature,—and indeed she has wrote several pretty things herself.—When last I saw her, she was telling me how happy she should be to hear of a young person who could read to her, and had a taste for poetry.—I am convinced she would be delighted with this young lady.” “Cousin, (interrupted Mrs.

Barlow) this is a most excellent thought of your's;—I am delighted with it—Mrs. Welwood is the very person on earth that will suit Miss Belton.—They may talk together by the hour (continued she smiling) of the ancients and the moderns,—and of Hector and Andromache.—I am amaz'd I never thought of Mrs. Welwood myself.—She is quite the thing.—And what is better than all her learning, I believe her to be a very good woman.—We were school-fellows.—But I must not betray her age, as she is *un-married*.—Pray, Cousin, think farther of this.”

“She is now at Bath, but I will write to her by to-morrow's post,”—said Mr. Barlow.

I made all due acknowledgements, and we spent a most agreeable day—Mrs. Barlow seeming a little better:—but ah! I fear her time with us is short!—Fear!—did I say?—selfish wretch!

wretch! can I grieve for her approaching release from the miseries of a long and painful illness?

Adieu, my dear friend,
believe me your's
unalterably,

F. B.

P. S. I wonder, Lucy, whether poor Sir Charles Belford has left Grimston-house, yet! — surely, he must by this time.—How do I wish to know if he is perfectly recover'd from his *accident*! I think Mr. Addison, in one of his excellent *Spectators*, remarks, that a woman commonly mentions the *most interesting* point which lays nearest her heart in a *postscript*.—Ah! Lucy—I leave you to apply his observation.

✍ Several letters, at this period, from Miss Belton to her friend are here omitted, as they contain nothing essentially

entially necessary to the thread of her story. For the space of three months nothing particularly relative to her own concerns, but the continued humanity and kindness of her benevolent friend Mrs. Barlow, whose declining state is every day more evident; and that the worthy clergyman is making enquiries of Mrs. Welwood, if she would be willing to take Miss Belton as a *literary* companion, in case of the decease of Mrs. Barlow, which is daily now expected.

L E T T E R XVIII.

London Aug. 20.

I Write this, my Lucy, by the bedside of my excellent friend.—She is now in a sweet slumber;—but has been visibly, for some days past, drawing towards what she calls *her release*.

release.—I am watching over her as I would the fading sweetness of a flower, which, whilst I am admiring its attractive fragrance, insensibly droops and withers under my sight.

“ Fanny, (said this angelic woman, a few hours since) I am going very fast—my task is almost finish’d.—I have a few words, my child, to say to thee.—Nay, weep not—(she continued, observing I was in tears)—you have a *divine friend* at hand.—Your happiness, my love,—your happiness in this world, does not depend on any degree of station whatever; or on any external circumstance, but in the most inflexible adherence to the strictest rules of religion and virtue.—Depend on it, my poor child, whatever may be your sufferings, with regard to this changeable state, you will find virtue and goodness, an equivalent for all the evils that the world can inflict; and much more than

than adequate for all the good it can bestow.—But I grow faint—I must be brief.—I have only to say, whatever may be your trials—your temptations—stand your ground:—be resolutely virtuous:—whatever may be your trials, there is still a way to escape.—I die, my child—but I die content.—Methinks I feel, even in the pangs of death, such exultations of conscience, as are a kind of foretaste of those joys, I trust, I am entering on.—O the sweet remembrance of those difficulties I have conquer'd!—of those afflictions I have sustain'd with fortitude!”

She stopp'd her pathetic advice, for a few moments, being too faint to proceed:—then looking round, as I knelt, holding her dear hand, in speechless grief,—“When all is over with me (she resum'd) my cousin Barlow will convey you down to Mrs. Welwood, who informs me she will with great pleasure receive you for a
com-

companion.—I wish I were in circumstances, my Fanny, to leave you a handsome legacy ; but, in truth, my long illness, and a tedious lawsuit, has drain'd me of my cash.—In yonder little cabinet, you will find, after my decease, a small token to remember me by.”

O Lucy, never shall I forget the tone—the affecting manner in which she uttered these broken sentences.—She soon afterwards began to ramble.—“ Hark !—hark !—(said she, holding up her hand) do you not hear sweet music ?——What heavenly sounds !”—After this she dropt into a slumber, in which she now lays.

Ah ! my friend,—whatever may be my future sufferings, may I at last die the death of the righteous !—may my last end be like this !——But here the physician enters.

Oh,

* * * * *

Ten at night.

Oh, my Lucy, all is over—the faint is now at peace.—About noon she awak'd from her slumber.—I rais'd her in my arms—the nurse attending. She look'd earnestly in my face, and endeavour'd to pronounce the words, “Bless—bless—, —I come”—and without sigh or groan expired on my breast.—O my friend, I felt at that awful moment as if the *whole world* was gone from me.—I gaz'd on the lifeless corse, in speechless agony.—I must lay down my pen, and relieve my overcharg'd heart—by another burst of tears.

* * * * *

Thursday.

I have been, for the last time, taking an eternal leave of my late dear, incomparable friend, before the
coffin

coffin is clos'd for ever. I begg'd the attendants to retire for a few moments. Being left alone with the awful re-
-licks, I approach'd the corpse,—I gaz'd on the pallid countenance,—I kiss'd her cold lips, in an agony of affliction.—Death, my Lucy, did not in *her* appear in its usual deformity—the sweet smile still remain'd.

“ Ah! (I cried) have I then lost you, my patroness?—my only support—my consolation!—I had no father, friend, or world to own me:—but you became father, friend, and all the world to me.—I was a stranger and ye took me in,—fed,—supported me—but alas you are gone from me, for ever!—How shall I ease my soul of the mighty debt of gratitude to this dear woman!—alas! she is gone—gone for ever!”—Thus did I lament, and found even a sweetness in weeping; which always is the case, when our sorrows flow for a worthy object.

The

* * * * *

Monday.

The remains of my lamented friend, are carried out of town to be deposited in a family vault in Dorsetshire.

I have open'd the little drawer in the cabinet, according to the desire of the dear departed; where, seal'd up carefully, in a little box thus directed, "For Miss Belton, to be open'd after my death," I found ten guineas; but what was infinitely more valuable to me, a small miniature picture of the dear woman, set round with diamonds.—I held it to my heart, and shall contemplate every day those features in which sense and sweetness were united.

Good Mr. Barlow has desir'd me to accept of very handsome mourning,—and also of a diamond ring, in remembrance of his beloved cousin.—He proposes taking me in his own post-chaise

chaife to Welwood Abbey (the ancient feat of Mrs. Welwood) and intends fetting out on the journey to-morrow.—How thankful ought I to be to Providence that I am fallen into fuch *good hands*;—whilst fo many poor young creatures, in this great metropolis, are perifhing in the ftreets, from having experienced the fad reverse! Mrs. Williams (kind woman) rejoices at my happy fortune, as fhe fays, to be fure I fhall be provided for life, by this good lady to whom I am going.

As I am, my dear, now in *prosperity*, I will not forget thofe in *adversity*. I accordingly flipp'd up into poor Mrs. Perry's green garret to day, and put a guinea in her hand.—It is imagin'd fhe cannot live many weeks longer.—Mr. Barlow has promis'd to take one of her children, and that moft worthy phyfician, Dr. Fothergill, whose humanity does honour

nour to human nature, and who now attends the dying mother, has promis'd to take another. So you see *Providence* has already provided for these little babes, by means which mock'd our feeble foresight.

Mr. Barlow proposes (as the journey will be too long for one day, being quite in a remote part of Wiltshire) to sleep at Andover—where, my dear, I will finish this epistle.—In the mean time adieu.

* * * * *

Andover.

At length, my friend, I have left the noisy metropolis; and, after an agreeable day's journey, am safely arriv'd at this town.—You may be sure that my good companion and I have not wanted for *conversation*. Indeed the inexhaustible topic of literature, left us not one moment at a loss for chat.

Mr.

Mr. Barlow, after supper this evening, in a most friendly manner, has been giving me a particular account of the lady to whom I am going.

“ It will not be amiss,” said he, “ my good Miss Belton, to give you a few *hints*, relative to the character of Mrs. Welwood. She is a worthy woman:—indeed I know of no foible she has, except a *little*,—a very little share of vanity,—in respect to her literary merit.—She certainly is a woman of learning and genius, and she *knows* it:—there consists her *pride*.—A certain great author says, who well knew the human heart, “ that we should *respect* our friends *foibles*.” It appears a paradox, but there is much truth in the observation.

She is, as I have told you before, a single lady, upwards of fifty;—and lives very respectably in the old mansion-house of the family, which is very ancient. Her estate is not more
than

than five hundred pounds a year,—but, with good management, she lives upon it in a very genteel manner. I will not promise, my dear child, that your situation will be lucrative,—because Mrs. Welwood's fortune is not large; but you will certainly be agreeably situated, and what is more than all things for so *young* a person as yourself, you will be in safe and honourable hands.—You will have too the advantage of a great deal of time to pursue your studies.—You will write verses now, Miss Belton, more than ever you did.—The very situation of the romantic old abbey, where my friend Mrs. Penelope Welwood resides, would inspire any one with poetry, who has the least turn for it. Upon the whole, I am convinced you will be pleas'd with your situation.—The lady, to be sure, has some *peculiarities*, but she is a good woman.—You will remember, however, the *hint* I gave you."

VOL. II.

D

I thank'd

I thank'd my friend, very heartily,
for his kind advice; and we soon after
retir'd to our apartments.—I was,
however, determin'd, before I slept,
to give you an account of this con-
versation, and also to assure you, I am
your most faithful,

F. B.

L E T T E R X I X.

Welwood Abbey, August 31.

“Thy forests, Welwood, and thy green retreats,
“At once the Muses, and the Dryads seats,
 “Invite my lays.”
“Here hills and vales, the woodland and the
 “plain,
“Here earth, and water, seem to strive again.”]

POPE.

IN good truth, my friend, I am de-
lighted with my situation. I was
receiv'd by the good lady of this an-
cient mansion with great pleasure; to
say

say with *civility*, would not be indeed doing her *justice*; for she even expresses'd that kind of delight on my arrival, which is ever felt by those who have a *passion* for any particular science, when they imagine they have gain'd some kind of acquisition in *their own way*.

Mrs. Welwood, I fancy, has been very handsome in her youth. She appears rather careless in her dress, being wholly intent on her studies.—She is certainly a woman of learning and genius, and amazingly attach'd to letters.—She receiv'd me in her library,—the whole room, which is spacious, scatter'd over with books, writings, papers, &c. Our acquaintance began even with intimacy.

I have now been here four days, in which time she has shewn me three tragedies of her writing, — poems, odes, and sonnets, out of number.— I perceive her works all turn upon the

tender passion,—setting forth the infidelity of the other sex;—by which I imagine, and from a few unguarded hints she has dropp'd, she has met with some very great disappointment in former days in some love affair; which has occasion'd her to seclude herself almost from the world in this retirement.—The situation of this ancient abbey is delicately romantic,—and there is an air of solitude throught the whole venerable mansion, which is wonderfully pleasing.

I may indeed say,

“ In these deep solitudes and awful cells,

“ Where heavenly — pensive contemplation

“ dwells,

“ And ever-musing melancholy reigns.”

* * * * *

My poetical genius (if I have one) will be more powerful than ever:—I shall write verses now, Lucy, from morning till night. I have already shewn Mrs. Welwood my whole stock

of performances, on which she has bestow'd more encomiums than I shall repeat: but this I will however say, that she seems as much *pleas'd* with your Fanny, as her humble servant is with her very agreeable situation.

I have a handsome apartment allotted me, hung with curious old tapestry; and my bed, which was made in the reign of good queen Elizabeth, is so ornamented with tassels and fringes, that I am perpetually hanging my petticoats in them. I believe it has been a kind of state bed. It is raised so high from the floor, by two carv'd lions at the feet, and two gorgons at the head, that it is with no small difficulty I ascend it without danger.—There is something awfully pleasing to a thoughtful mind, in contemplating the remains of antiquity:—they seem a faithful memento of what we shall be ourselves in a few

years.—When I survey the filigree dressing-boxes on my table, and the curious old tape lace round my toilette (the work it seems of a lady Dorothy Welwood, in the days of James the first) I am struck with admiration at the ingenuity and industry of those fingers, long since mouldering in the dust: in truth, I really believe, Lucy, our great, great grandmothers were never idle:—the business of *their* lives was not *cards*; the reigning *passion*, I am told, at present.

The servants of this venerable mansion, are almost feeble with old age.—I am delighted with the silver locks of Abraham, the butler;—and of Mrs. Deborah, the lady's woman, in her white hood and spectacles.—The domestics, in fact, manage here every thing; for Mrs. Welwood is so absorbed in contemplation, and so devoted to the muses, that she seldom descends to any *common* occurrence of life,

life, or knows what is for dinner, till it is upon the table.—But don't you smile to hear me say this, who am as little *inclin'd* towards terrestrial matters as herself? To preserve the family honour, she lives up, I imagine, to the utmost extremity of her fortune: and yet, though the good lady keeps up all her forms, I have not yet observ'd any thing of that *pride*, of which Mr. Barlow gave me a kind hint; but possibly, that may consist in her learning and genius. She, I find, was intimately acquainted with Gay, Pope, Swift, and all the wits of that time. She talks of Prior too as of a particular friend; and has shewn me letters from all these great geniuses, with whom she corresponded.

* * * * *

Sept. 16.

I have now been here above a fortnight, and am, if possible, every day

D 4

more

more pleas'd with my situation. It is a great advantage to me, my dear, to have the use of such a fine library as Mrs. Welwood's, which abounds in excellent authors. But, to my great surprise, I found in it also several immense folios of ancient romances; such as Clelia, Cassandra, Cleopatra, and the countess of Montgomery's Urania;—in which I found three eclogues of my patroness's writing. One entitled the Perjur'd Lover, another the Forsaken Maid, and the third the Broken Vow.—They were all written in the tender style, wonderfully plaintive;—and served to confirm me in my opinion, that her *heart* has met with some severe disappointment.—Now would I give my very best ode to know her history, and whether she had unfortunately fix'd her affections on one *beneath*, or one *above* her,—like your poor Fanny.—Smile, if you please, my dear.

I have

I have the whole mornings to myself, which I spend in my closet in writing.—I never see Mrs. Welwood till twelve at noon, when the old coach is constantly at the gates to carry us an airing.—The afternoons we spend most agreeably: and such is our astonishing *thirst*, or passion for books and poetry, that what with reading some of the best authors, and repeating our own verses, &c. we seldom part till midnight.—Were an indifferent spectator to come in upon us, we should be thought half-mad.

I am as much delighted with the old rookery just by my chamber-windows, as I should be, or more so, than with the finest collection of Chinese pheasants, or curious menagerie of other foreign birds. Every thing here, my Lucy, aids my poetical genius.

“ The darksome pines, that o’er yon rocks re-
 “ clin’d,
 “ Wave high, and murmur to the hollow wind;
 “ The wand’ring streams, that shine between the
 “ hills,
 “ The grotts that echo to the tinkling rills;
 “ The dying gales that pant upon the trees,
 “ The lakes that quiver to the curling breeze;
 “ All these soft scenes, my meditation aid,
 “ Or lull to rest the visionary maid.”

* * * * *

My kind benefactress has just presented me with a ten pound note, to buy a negligee, and other fashionable matters, as she says she, would have me always appear with her, in whatever families she visits. “ Fanny,” said she, “ I shall give you this small sum half-yearly.—Would it were in my power to give you ten times as much, but my estate is barely sufficient to support my rank;—our family being one of the most ancient and respectable in this county.—I

esteem

esteem you infinitely, my dear, not only for your *literary merit*, which is great, but for the good qualities of your heart.—In return for my regard for you, I desire only this proof of *friendship*, I am going to mention, and which I shall make the *test* of your affection for me.”

I eagerly replied, “Dearest madam, tell me—only tell me, in what I can oblige you, and I will make it the utmost study of my life to merit your favours.”

“Well,” said she smiling, “it is this:—I am growing old, my dear, apace, and must now expect the infirmities of age to steal upon me:—consequently my intellectual faculties, as my memory, genius for writing, &c. will be impair’d as well as my bodily health.—Now, what I desire is, that on your finding the least diminution of merit in my future writings, the least *flagging* in my style, or

the smallest want of that *fire*, or *genius*, which the world has been pleas'd to allow me;—I say, my Fanny, whenever you find the above lapses of my pen, I beg, nay I absolutely insist on it, that in all the sincerity of friendship, you advertise me of it.—I have lately had bad health;—nothing hurts and impairs the genius more.—Remember I insist on this *test* of your friendship for me.”

“Madam,” said I, “long—very long, may it be before your genius droops—I should be very sorry if it did.”

“Well, but give me your promise,” said she, “that you will comply with my request.”

“I do,” said your Fanny.

We have had this afternoon a very agreeable family to drink tea: and as every one in this neighbourhood knows Mrs. Welwood's talents for literature, (though probably they may call it her *foible*) nothing else was
talk'd

History of FANNY BEL

talk'd of, but works of great poetry, &c. Many of Mrs Wood's works were produced, and highly extoll'd.—The little productions of your Fanny's pen came in (though perhaps undeservedly) for their share of praises.

Mr. Barlow and his amiable wife were part of this agreeable circle.—How did the good man seem pleas'd with the kind partiality to my respectable patroness, for your poor friend !

* * * * *

Lucy, I am half mad with joy.—This instant have I receiv'd three most precious packets from your dear hand.—I kiss the seals ; I hold them to my heart ;—I weep over them with tears of fond remembrance.—Twice have they cross'd the line in their watery passage !—I read them as if they were written only *yesterday* ;—without considering

sidering they came eight months ago from Madras. On my leaving London, I desir'd Mr. Williams to enquire at the India-House for letters,—and to forward them to me here.

And so, my dear, there are no hopes of your returning for many years to come!—Well—we must be patient.

I will now close this epistle, and send it with an enormous packet for you, already written, as I have an opportunity of sending it by a safe hand to the India-House, to go by the first ship.

Heaven preserve my inexpressibly dear friend, prays her

F. B.

¶ Here follows an interval of near a year, in which Miss Belton continues her correspondence with her friend as before; but the letters are omitted, as containing little more than repetitions of her liking her agreeable situation at Welwood Abbey;

bey; and of the continuance of the friendship from the good lady of the mansion. She, however, laments that that they have lost Mr. Barlow out of their neighbourhood, as he had chang'd preferment with a clergyman in Cornwall, and was gone to reside there.

L E T T E R XX.

Welwood Abbey, Aug. 2.

I Mention'd in my last epistle* to my dear friend that Mrs. Welwood is going to visit a relation in Somersetshire. *We*—for she is so kind to take me with her—are to stay a fortnight.—You cannot imagine how smart my dress will be on this occasion. I have more than half exhausted my small stock of finances, in my fineries.—To-morrow we set

* Written in the afore-mentioned interval.

out,

64 *The WOMAN of LETTERS; or,*
out, and—but I am interrupted.—
“Coming, good Mrs. Deborah!”

* * * * *

Ashly Park, Somersetshire, Aug. 4.

O my Lucy, I have such an incident to tell you!—My benefactress and I set out, as I told you we should, on our journey to this seat. On the second day (for it is above sixty miles from the Abbey) such an incident (an *adventure* I cannot call it) happen'd, that my foolish, *vain*, weak heart, has not yet recover'd itself from such a state of palpitation, that I cannot yet think of it without trembling.

“The matter Fanny (you cry) what, another highwayman?—or what other hair-breadth 'scape did you meet with?”

Nothing of the kind, my Lucy:—we met with neither robbers nor ravishers:—but yet what, to my dying day,

day, I shall not forget.—As well as I am able, I will try to recollect my scatter'd thoughts, on this *heart-felt* occasion.

My friend and I yesterday morning were travelling in a pleasant road, and in the midst of discussing a particular point in one of *Homer's* battles,—when we observ'd in a park, just by the road side, a procession of no less than six coaches coming up a very fine avenue of oaks, which led from a noble seat, to a magnificent pair of gates, into the heath, on which lay the high-road. The carriages advanced slowly, and indeed made a most brilliant appearance; as on their nearer approach we observ'd the attendants, who were numerous, had all white and silver favours in their hats.

“What,” said Mrs. Welwood, “have we a wedding here?—It must be so.”

She

She then call'd to her servants to stop her carriage, and to draw a little out of the road; which it indeed was necessary for us to do, that the procession, which was now got to the great gates, might have room to pass by us.

de “Dear Madam,” said I, “let us see this grand parade, pray.”—Ah, Lucy, little thinking that—But to proceed.—It was indeed a most gallant show.—I was particularly pleas'd with twelve little country girls, all dress'd in white, with chaplets of roses, who each of them with a basket on her arm, walk'd slowly before the coaches, strewing the way with flowers, and odoriferous herbs.—The innocence, and sweet simplicity of these little maidens, gave me great pleasure.

The coaches now all advanced in great order; the company in them appear'd to be most elegantly dress'd:

—last

—last of all follow'd a magnificent new post-coach and four, the postillions in silver laced liveries,—&c. the horses heads were even adorn'd with white and silver ribbons, dispos'd in a very pretty manner.—This carriage was empty, and seem'd apparently for the reception of the bride and bridegroom, after the ceremony was over: but who the bride and bridegroom were, we could not distinguish:—there was so much indeed for us to gaze at, that we could fix on no one object.—This gay procession directed its course to a church which we saw just before us;—a number of country people following, all with joyous faces.

“ This,” said Mrs. Welwood, when the whole was gone by,—“ this must surely be a wedding of some people of great fashion.”

That moment a country farmer passing, she ask'd him who all that fine company were? “ God

“ God blefs you, miftrefs,” faid the man, “ why, where did you come from?—There’s to be nothing but feafting and open houfe at the hall, for this fortnight.—What, Madam, don’t you know that Sir Charles Belford, the beft gentleman in the world, is now, this very moment, gone to be married at yonder church, to Mifs Crowfoot, a huge rich heirefs.—All the county is invited.—Such a wedding before was never in all the whole county.”

What farther the fellow faid, I know not.—A dimnefs feiz’d my eyes,—a tremor invaded my whole frame,—and I funk instantly back in the carriage, fainting.—Foolifh, ridiculous creature that I am!—what can the wedding of Sir Charles Belford be to me?

Mrs. Welwood did all ſhe could, by the help of her falts, to recover me.

“ Heavens!” faid ſhe, “ Fanny, what

what is the matter?—Is it the heat of the weather that has overcome you?”

I said, I believ'd it was :—and that I had drank too much strong coffee for breakfast.

This past for a reason of my disorder, and we proceeded on our journey.

“ Fanny,” said Mrs. Welwood, “ as you have always a muse at your elbow, you shall make an epithalamium on these bridal folks.”—What answer I made I know not,—but my friend soon after began a dissertation on the manner of the *ancient* weddings, as describ'd by the poets of former times ; which discourse of *her's* (for I took no part in it) lasted for about seven miles, when we arriv'd at our journey's end.

Unfortunately that day, Mrs. Ashley, the lady of this hospitable mansion, had a great deal of company at dinner.—I say *unfortunately*, because
it

it brought on a discourse which made me very angry with that little *weak, unruly* heart of mine.

Soon after we were all seated at table, Mrs. Welwood began: "I have seen this morning the grandest procession of a wedding, I ever beheld: I am told it was Sir Charles Belford's. Pray who is the gentleman?—A man of large fortune, I suppose, from his being so attended."

"Sir Charles Belford," said Mrs. Ashley, "is, I believe, not only one of the worthiest of human beings, but also one of the most accomplish'd of men;—his fortune is extremely large,—but his merit is beyond every thing."

Here I felt for my pocket handkerchief, in order to hide a blush,—and a tremor which suddenly seiz'd me.

"I wanted," said Mrs. Welwood, "to have a peep at the bride, but was not so fortunate.—Did *you* see her,

her, Miss Belton? (addressing herself to me) but I think you said not.—This little question, somehow, my dear, went directly to my heart,—but I replied, as well as I could,—“No—Madam.”

“I was exceedingly pleas’d,” resum’d Mrs. Welwood, “to see so many happy joyous faces, among so large a number of the country people.”

“There might be,” said a gentleman who sat near me, “a great many joyous *faces*,—but I fear—there was a very *heavy heart*, among *one* of the company.”

“Aye, poor young gentleman,” said another, “how greatly is he to be pitied!”

“I question,” said a third, “if there are five young men of fashion in Europe, would have acted with the extreme honour poor Sir Charles has, on such an occasion.—I know I should

should *not*, to such a piece of pride, and ill-nature. As to the lady's person, the deformity of that is out of the question, were her *mind* but accomplished'd. — Good Heavens! to think the finest young fellow in the world, should be sacrificed in this manner!—no father *ought* to have *exacted* such a request."

Ah! Lucy, what did I that moment suffer!—I really thought my heart would have beat through my bosom.

"It is really," said Mrs. Ashley, "a most singular affair altogether.—Nay, I am inform'd, that, not two months ago, Sir Charles very generously told Miss Crowfoot, he fear'd (mind this, my Lucy) that he had not a *heart* to give with his *hand*; and offer'd to relinquish half his fortune, to be releas'd from his *extorted* promise:—but no: the lady held him to his vow, and after a few fullen
tears

tears of pride, told him, she thought her hundred and fifty thousand pounds, was as good as his ten thousand a year,—and a deal more to the same purpose.—It is indeed very pitiable, if poor Sir Charles,” continu’d Mrs. Ashley, “ *does* really like any other young lady :—and upon my word, if he is not in love, and deeply too, with some one, I never saw any man so.—He din’d here (for we are very intimate) when my son was at home, about two months since :—but never in my life did I see such an alteration in any man.—So melancholy !—so absent !—My son gave his toast,—and call’d on Sir Charles for his.

“ I’ll give you an angel,” said he. —“ Here’s Miss B——.” —“ Who this Miss B—— is, I cannot conceive ; but I am convinced, by what he said, she has made no small impression on his heart,” — continu’d Mrs. Ashley.

Here the good company all join'd
 in their pity of Sir Charles—and do
 you think *I* did not, my Lucy?—
 Whilst they were giving their dif-
 ferent opinions, a country squire, who
 sat next to me, turn'd round, and tap-
 ping my cheek, “What say *you*,
 young lady, to this *cruel* match; don't
you pity the young baronet? you say
 nothing, but you *think* the more, I
 suppose.—Come, a penny for your
 thoughts.”—How I blush'd!—“I
 pity every one, (said I, involuntarily
 sighing) who is unhappy.”

But this Miss B——, my dear, who
 can she be?—Certainly, there are hun-
 dreds in the world whose names be-
 gin with that letter:—but yet, Lucy,
 my heart tells me—an unaccountable
something whispers to my soul, that
 your poor Fanny is the unhappy ob-
 ject of Sir Charles's affection.—
 “What insufferable vanity!” you cry.
 On

On the ladies retiring into the drawing room, and whilst we were engag'd with our tea, Mrs. Welwood, whose heart I before hinted to you, has been, I am convinced, touch'd with the tender passion,—again began the late (to *me* heart-rending) subject, in begging to know, what were the particulars relative to Sir Charles's being in honour oblig'd to marry this disagreeable lady.

“ No other,” said Mrs. Ashley, “ than that Sir Jeffery Crowfoot (a man of immense fortune) sav'd the life of Sir Anthony Belford, (the father of this present baronet) in attempting to ford a river, at the hazard of his own person. This so excited the friendship and gratitude of Sir Anthony, that he made the most solemn promise to give him whatsoever he ask'd.—Nay, said he, to unite our families for ever, you have an only daughter, and I an only son—he will

have a clear ten thousand pounds a year.—What say you, shall it be a match?—as to the liking of the young folks, that will come of course.—Sir Jeffery eagerly assented, as their *estates* join'd;—and Sir Anthony, at his death, which happen'd about a year after, bound his son (then barely fourteen years of age) in a solemn vow to marry Miss Rachael Crowfoot. This request, Charles, said he, I make the *test* of your duty and affection to me. The poor youth certainly made the fatal promise;—but, unfortunately, the lady, on his acquaintance with her, prov'd extremely disagreeable both in mind and person.—In marrying her, he has sacrificed his own private happiness to the dying will of his father.—As to his making this *public* wedding, I know his chief motive is to render the poor, of all the neighbouring parishes, happy for a fortnight to come, by keeping open house;

house; nay, I may say for all the county;—for his hospitality and benevolence, are as great as the rest of his virtues.—The neighbouring gentry, too, were all invited.—My son George is gone to be bridesman.—A wedding (continu'd Mrs. Ashley, smiling) to us in a county so far from the metropolis, is an event that will serve us for conversation months to come."

I shall, my dear friend, make no farther comments on the above affair, but that I think it very cruel in a parent to sacrifice a son's future peace in such a manner!—Don't *you* Lucy, think so too?

Heigh ho!—It is now midnight, —and I am too melancholy to add more, than that at supper this evening, a general health went round to the happiness of the bride and bridegroom. I wish it very sincerely. So subscribes

Your faithful

E 3

E. B.

L E T.

L E T T E R XXI.

Ashley Park, Aug. 20.

THIS last fortnight, my dear friend, has been one continu'd scene of dressing, visiting, &c. The whole neighbourhood seeming to vie which shall shew their old acquaintance Mrs. Welwood most respect. And yet I am convinced they look upon her uncommon talents for literature, rather as a *foible*, than an excellence. — This, my dear must, I fancy, at the bottom, proceed from *envy*; for why should not learning in our sex, be as commendable as in the other?

Mrs. Ashley, Mrs. Welwood, and a large party are gone this afternoon to make the bridal-visit to lady Belford, who sits up, it seems, this week in form to receive her company.

“ And

“ And how happens it, Fanny, (my Lucy asks) that you, who always visit with your patroness, did not go too ?”

Indeed, my dear, it was my own choice not to see Sir Charles Belford again.—I pleaded a bad head-ach ; and though Mrs. Ashly—dear, good woman !—us’d her utmost endeavours to persuade me to be one of the party ; adding,—“ Have you no curiosity, Miss Belton, to see this bride ?” Yet I was not to be prevail’d upon.—In truth, my friend, I had my *reasons*, and those neither ungenerous, nor indelicate ; as you shall hear.

In the first place then I have reason to believe that, notwithstanding my humble situation, I was lately not indifferent to Sir Charles Belford : and why should I wish to revive in his honourable bosom an unhappy passion ?—No, I will not disturb ;—I was going to say, his happiness—at

least I may say, this ill-fated union of his.—I cannot answer, my dear, but I might myself have been uncommonly affected, in again beholding this too amiable man.—He might observe my emotions,—he might pity them,—which might probably renew sentiments that ought to be buried now for ever.—I shall ever pray for his happiness, whatever may be the fate of your poor Fanny.

I hope, my dear, I shall have your approbation for this step of *self-denial*, in avoiding the company of this most worthy man:—but I seem on this occasion *satisfied* with *myself*; and that is always a convincing proof, with me, that I have acted *right*.

I have been scribbling to you, my friend, the whole afternoon, and am now going to take a solitary walk in the park,—which I often do, and carry bread for the little fauns, who trip after me, and eat out of my hand.

The

* * * * *

The ladies on their return from the visit to Belford-Hall, were full of the pride, and haughty behaviour, of the bride.—Poor Sir Charles, by their account, is the very image of melancholy.—Heigh ho! — but not one word more about him, as he is now another's.

To-morrow is fix'd for our departure from this agreeable family.— I am interrupted.— Coming, good Mrs. Ashley.

* * * * *

Welwood Abbey, Sept. 20.

A month, my Lucy, —a tedious month hath past, since I have been able to snatch a moment to make use of my pen.—Alas! my dear,—poor Mrs. Welwood has been dangerously ill.—The day after our journey home, she was seiz'd with a dread-

ful fit,—a kind of apoplexy.—I have been terrified to death :—but, I thank heaven, she is now wonderfully better. We have had two of the best physicians from Bath; and they now give very good hopes.—I have not left her bed-side one moment,—and have given her every medicine with my own hand.—But I must attend my nursery.—She wakes.

* * * * *

Sept. 30.

I have the pleasure of saying, my benefactress gains strength daily,—and for these two last days, has been out an airing.

“ Fanny (she has just been saying) if I had died in my late illness, I should have left you all my *manuscripts*.—I trust it would have been no inconsiderable legacy.

“ I made all proper acknowledgements on the occasion, but hoped it would

would be long—very long, before they would be in my possession on that melancholy occasion.

* * * * *

October 14.

I have been so busily employ'd, my dear, in reading to, and attending my friend, that I have not, for this last fortnight, been able to pursue my most favourite amusement, that of writing to my Lucy. Mrs. Welwood is quite recover'd, and begins again amusing herself with her pen. She is composing, she tells me, an Ode on Health.—I long to see it.—As to my own performances, my dear, I have a great many already finish'd; as for these last twelve months, excepting the time of Mrs. Welwood's illness, I have, in this sweet solitude, had as much leisure as I could possibly desire. The scenes here seem the peculiar seat of the

muses.—I have finish'd writing the tragedy I mention'd to you long since :—and a connoisseur near us, who has perus'd it, strongly advises me to offer it to one of the managers ;—or to some one who will recommend it to him.—I have not yet determin'd if I shall pursue this measure, but as Shakespear says,

“ ’Tis ten to one but *I shall.*”

We are to have a great deal of company to-morrow, to dine and spend the day, and some of them of Mrs. Welwood's class of literature.—Adieu for to night. I wish much to have a peep at her new ode, which seems much to engross her whole attention.—Once more good night.

* * * * *

In Continuation.

London, Saturday.

Ah! my friend, I have a most astonishing incident to inform you of.

—But

—But are you not already amaz'd to see this dated from London?—But what will you say, when I tell you, I have had the irreparable misfortune to offend Mrs. Welwood (though heaven knows very innocently) and that I am for ever banish'd from Welwood-Abbey? Gracious powers! by what a slender thread do we hold our tenure of happiness in this world!—But instead of making moral reflections on this occasion, I must hasten to give you an account, as well as my scatter'd thoughts will permit, of this wonderful alteration in my affairs.

I think I told you we were to have company—they came—and after dinner, the conversation turn'd, as it generally did at the Abbey, on literature.—A gentleman unfortunately ask'd Mrs. Welwood if she had any new production; on this she took out her pocket-book, and smiling said, she had compos'd an ode to health,

occasion'd by her late illness, and, if agreeable, Miss Belton shall read it.

The company all with one voice were eager to hear it—and being all, as the expression is in romance, “*conveniently seated*,” I took the ode from Mrs. Welwood, and read it in an audible voice, but ah, Lucy, such bombast stuff surely, never was penn'd before!—false grammar—worn-out similies—obscure phrases—in every line.—I blush'd as I read, that my poor good friend should so ridiculously expose herself.—I would, if possible, have omitted many lines (for it was above two sheets of large paper) but as Mrs. Welwood was all attention, that could not be done.—I saw at once her intellectual faculties, by her illness, must have been evidently weaken'd, by such a long rhapsody of nonsense.—The repetitions too confirm'd me her memory was much
 2 impair'd;

impair'd ;—and yet, such false flattery of this world, one cried,—“ admirable !” another — “ what a sweet thought !”—and a third—“ charming !”—but I saw two or three of the gentlemen stuff their pocket handkerchiefs in their mouths, to prevent a fit of laughter.—This hurt me greatly :—and I griev'd inly, that my benefactress had not previously favoured me with a sight of her performance, as I would then have taken the liberty of friendship to have told her my sincere opinion of it.

None of the company staid supper, as they liv'd at some distance.—They were no sooner gone, than Mrs. Welwood, in high good humour, began.—“ Well, my Fanny, how do you like my ode ?—I think I have gain'd immortal honour by it.—Come, tell me sincerely and truly, what you think.—Remember, I made it a *test* of your friendship, that if you ever found

found my *genius* abate of its *fire*, you should tell me.—Come—speak out.”

“Madam,” said I,—“I should be a most ungrateful wretch, if I did not, on this, and every other occasion, obey your commands.—But will you not be offended, madam, if I speak my poor opinion?”——“Offended, child!—no certainly.—Go on.”

“Why then, dear madam (said I timidly) I really do not think this last work of your’s the least comparable to your other poetry.”

“What is it (said she coolly) the *versification* you dislike?”

“Dear madam spare me.”

“Nay (return’d she) I insist upon knowing all your objections to the *poem*!”

I then, very honestly and candidly, told her my opinion of the whole,—and pointed out, for the ode lay on the table,—my objections.

“So it does not meet, Miss Bel-
ton

ton (said she very gravely) with your approbation?"

Supper was at that moment brought in,—during which she never open'd her lips, but seem'd in a thoughtful mood.—As to myself, I was ready to sink into the earth;—I saw I had said too much.

A profound silence continu'd for some minutes after supper, and the servants were withdrawn:—when no longer able to bear my fears that I had displeas'd her — “Dearest madam,” cried I, “tell me if I have been so unhappy as to offend you.”

“Offend me!—(she gravely replied) no—God forbid!”

“You will please to remember madam (said I, cut to the heart by her unkind manner of speaking) that it was your own desire that I should speak my real sentiments.”

She stopt me short, with,—“O 'tis mighty well. I always thought,
Miss

Miss Belton, you had a pretty talent for poetry, but I find I had a *critic* under my roof:—I did not indeed know you were arriv'd to so sublime an art as *criticism*.”—O Lucy, how cruel and unjust, was this sarcasm!—Then, suddenly looking at her watch, she pull'd the bell, and rising with great state, said, “I wish you a good night, Miss Belton,”—and walk'd off to her apartment.

I stood for some moments in a kind of stupid astonishment:—then lifting up my eyes to heaven, ‘my God (said I) thou hast promis'd never-failing rewards to those who suffer for truth—for sincerity:—thou, who knowest the heart,—take pity on thy poor creature!’—I burst into tears—and retir'd to my chamber.

You will imagine I spent a wretched night.—I saw I had mortally offended my only friend on earth,—my protector and benefactress:—and yet, my
 dear,

dear, there is something so *comforting* in the idea of having acted with *sincerity* (as I can truly say, in the present case, I did) that it seems a counterbalance for the misfortune, whatever it may be.—I should have had much to reproach me, indeed, if I had conceal'd my *real* opinion of the sentiments of my heart in this matter to my friend:—in the sweet consciousness, therefore, of having done *right*, I dropp'd towards morning into a slumber;—and I began to hope that, possibly, Mrs. Welwood's wrath might, by that time, be abated:—but alas! I was much deceiv'd in my hopes!

When we met in the morning, I again besought her forgiveness, if I had innocently offended!—when, to my amazement, she replied,—
 “Miss Belton, I am going soon to Bath, and as I shall take Miss Hillman with me, I shall have no farther
 occasion

occasion for you.—My chaise shall carry you to-morrow to the next town, where the London coaches pass through daily;—for I suppose you will go directly to London.”——I burst into tears, and was going to take her hand;—“O madam!” said I, sobbing.

“No words,”—interrupted she—“you know, in all my determinations, I am immoveable.—Here,” she continued, “is a ten pound note which is due for your last half year. I shall dine out to day, and remain all night at Lady Brompton’s, where I am going. My *intellectual* faculties, you see, child, are not so much *impair’d* by my late illness, but that my literary friends still *seek* my acquaintance.—I thank heaven—whatever *you*, Miss Belton, may think—my genius has not yet lost any of its *fire*, nor my style or sentiments any of their *energy*:—and so I wish you well.”—With these

these words she hastily left the room ; leaving me, Lucy, in a situation of mind more easily imagin'd than describ'd.

Ah ! exclaim'd I to my sad heart, you were right, Mr. Barlow !—I see—I see where the reigning foible of my late friend lay, but I was too *sincere* to flatter it.

As I saw I had no more favour to expect at Welwood Abbey, and that I must depart the next day, after many tears however, I seriously began to set about my little business of packing.—I had the wide world before me, —and was now again a helpless wanderer.—How unfortunate that I had not so kind and good a friend as Mr. Barlow to advise with !—But he, alas, was two hundred miles distant.

I however, determined to go to London, and to get what I could by my pen, in publishing a large collection of poems I had now by me,—two
volumes

volumes of sermons of my dear father, and many other things.—My tragedy I look upon as a treasure: and I have, likewise, a translation of Virgil's Eclogues, ready for the press.

I saw no more of Mrs. Welwood; as she, I imagine, *purposely* to avoid any farther discourse with me, staid at her friend's house all night.

I departed early the next morning from the Abbey in the chaise of my late benefactress, and got a place in the stage-coach for London.—There was only one passenger (an agreeable woman) beside your poor distress'd Fanny. On my approach to the great city, I suffer'd much perturbation of mind, concerning where I should lodge. My good friend Mrs. Williams, who had corresponded with me, having inform'd me in her last letter, that she was setting out for the Isle of Wight, with her husband, who had left off business, having had a small
estate

estate left him there: and that she never more should return to London.

Not knowing where to fix when I should arrive at the metropolis, and seeing my companion to be a good kind of woman, I ask'd her, if she could recommend me to a lodging.—She told me she herself was going into Essex to her daughter, but that she could recommend me to a distant relation of her's, who kept a China shop, and with whom she believed I might lodge. Accordingly she gave me a direction, and on my arrival at London, I went and agreed for a small chamber, where I now am.—I cannot say I am so well pleas'd with Mrs. Baxter, (the woman of the house) as I was with good Mrs. Williams; yet, she may be a very good woman, notwithstanding.

I am, at present, getting my manuscripts in readiness for a bookseller,

96 *The WOMAN of LETTERS, or,*
feller, therefore must in haste conclude.

I am, my dear friend,
Your's most sincerely,

F. B.

L E T T E R XXII.

London, November 20.

AH, my Lucy, I have been reduced to the borders of the grave!—A fever—a violent fever seiz'd your poor friend, in which I understand for a fortnight I was in extreme danger.—My youth, and a naturally good constitution, has, however, got the better of my disorder:—but, alas! what with nurses, and apothecary, I have only a few guineas remaining.—What occasion I could have for white wine and chickens, when I lay so long in a high fever, I cannot conceive; but so it is, that I have been
oblig'd

oblig'd to pay a long bill for both those articles to my landlady.—“ Mrs. Baxter, (said I) it behoves me to be frugal, as I have no friends in London.”

“ Dear Miss, (she replied) don't be uneasy about *that*.—So *pretty* a young creature as you are, need not be without *friends*, in such a great town as this.”

What could she mean, my dear?—I thought her speech very odd:—but she certainly meant nothing;—and, as my dear father us'd to say, to *suspect* without *proof*, is a crime of a deep dye.

I am now able to look over my writings, though still weak and faint:—however, to-morrow I intend to crawl out to the booksellers, with some of my performances.—On my arrival in London, I thought it proper to write to Mr. Barlow, an account of my dismissal from Wel-

wood Abbey,—but as yet I have had no answer from him.

* * * * *

Tuesday.

Well, my friend, I have made my visit to the bookseller:—an *ordeal* trial I may call it.—At last I have been admitted to one—after having, weak as I am, call'd at five different shops.—One was out,—another was at dinner,—a third was not then to be spoke with,—and a fourth had his hands full, &c. but at last, as I said, I have been admitted to the speech of one.—After standing an hour in the shop in waiting, I was desir'd to walk into a little parlour, where sat the bookseller himself. I was seiz'd with a tremor,—and presenting my manuscript of two volumes of poems, and Virgil's eclogues, with a volume of my father's sermons,—I in trembling accents, ask'd if he would purchase them. Indeed, I think I could not

have suffer'd more, than if I had been a culprit at the bar, standing before a judge, and expecting, every moment, a sentence of condemnation.—He put on his spectacles, and surveyed me attentively :—then looking at the manuscripts, a profound silence ensu'd for some minutes.—Guess my situation.—At last he look'd up, “ What, you are the writer, I suppose?—These kind of performances are a mere drug.—I have now no less than five authoresses already upon my hands.—You have the right *cadaverous* aspect, I see” —looking at me through his spectacles.

I felt a faint blush rise in my cheek, and humbly said, I was just recover'd from a fever, and that though *I was a writer*, I had not as yet experienced *famine*.”

“ That's much—that's much”—said he. Then looking over the papers—“ This will never do—never
F 2 fell,—

fell.—What, are these eclogues of your own translating? A mere drug.—I am overwhelm'd with translations.—We have whole shoals of translators come from *Scotland*.—Are you from thence?"

I replied in the negative.

"What are these sermons," said he, "for the benefit of the widow, and half a dozen children?—I'll not meddle with sermons:—nobody reads them.—Have you no novels?—well, young woman, at present my hands are quite full."

Lucy, at that moment, I *almost* breath'd a secret vow, whilst this man was speaking, that I would actually suffer even famine itself, than for the future have the least concern or dealings with either booksellers or printers:—but after I had dropp'd my curtsy, the man prov'd more benevolent than I imagined.

"Here,

“Here, come back,” said he, “leave your poems,—but take back your *sermons*,—and call upon me again in—in—about three weeks.—What have you any more writings to dispose of?”

I told him I had written a tragedy, which by some very good judges, had been thought worthy to be recommended to the managers.

“Indeed!—(said he) bring it to me,—and I will see what can be done.—I have a friend, who is very intimate with a gentleman very nearly related to one of the managers.”

This, Lucy, was agreeable intelligence, and I return’d home in better spirits than I went.—You may be certain I carried my tragedy the next day to the bookseller.

✂ An interval of a month now pass’d, in which, though Miss Belton continu’d her letters to her friend, yet as nothing of any consequence

F 3

relative

relative to her story occur'd, they are omitted, excepting the conclusion of one, which runs thus :

“ My bookfeller has not yet finish'd, he says, perusing my poems, though he has had them in his possession these five weeks :—and I have been miserably disappointed too about my tragedy.—I have been ten times, I really believe, at the house of the gentleman, to call for it.—This morning I went again—he was at home, and I was admitted. “ Here,” said he, “ is your work.—It has merit,—but it cannot be brought on the stage this season,—nor I cannot promise for the next.—I saw the manager last night,—but I can give you no satisfactory answer.”

I took the manuscript—but at the first glance of it, saw it was a comedy.—“ This, Sir,” said I, “ is *not* mine.” “ No!” said he, pettishly, “ where the d—l is your's then ?”—
He

He open'd an old book-case, and carelessly flung down seven or eight manuscript plays.—“There,” said he, “take your choice.—One has more plague with these females, who set up for writers, than even a Job could put up with.”

I took my play :—but, alas ! found the three first pages entirely defaced, and part of the second act torn out.—I took notice of these circumstances.

“Why, aye,” said this gentleman —“it has been flung about, and I fancy my cook has made free with a few of the pages to finge her fowls with.”

Ah ! thought I, how dared you to deceive me with your tale of shewing it the manager ?—Not one tittle of which do I now believe.

I took my piece with some marks of resentment.

F 4

“I am

“ I am sorry (said he) for the accident, but, no doubt, you have several copies.—The work has merit—but are you really the authorefs ?”

“ That (answered I) is very immaterial.”

“ Those eyes of your’s child,” said the wretch, “ might, I think, be better employ’d than in writing tragedies.”

I heard no more, for I withdrew immediately, with my torn defaced work ; which will be an infinite deal of trouble to me to write all over again, but which I am at present busily engag’d in. Ah ! my dear, perhaps it would have been more advantageous for me to be at this moment at my spinning-wheel, or even weaving cabbage-nets, than writing of tragedies !

Adieu : in all situations,

I am ever your’s,

F. B.
L E T-

L E T T E R XXIII.

December 2.

I Fear, my friend, I shall very soon experience what my bookseller tells me is the fate of many poor authors, in this great town.—But seriously, I am absolutely reduced to my last guinea; and am indebted some weeks rent to my landlady, Mrs. Baxter. Positively, if my bookseller—but here he comes.

What do you think, my dear, I have got for my poems?—The bookseller told me, that, by way of encouragement, as I had *some* genius—but take his own words—“ I shall not get a single fix-pence, by this work:—but I love to do a *charitable* action; for I suppose you are much in the same situation as the rest of your fraternity.—But to the point: I really and truly, on my *conscience*,

F 5

think

think that I offer you more than the worth of your poems, when I say that I will—mark what I say—as you have a promising genius, give you two guineas.”

“Two guineas!” exclaim’d I in amazement,—“what for two volumes?—I have been inform’d by a man of great judgment in these matters, I might expect thirty.”

“Softly—softly—child,”—said he—“I know not what you have been told;—I speak from the dictates of an honest heart;—I am a plain,—conscientious man,—I cannot flatter:—there—there is your money;—and indeed, to say the truth—it is a mere matter of *charity*—for my hands are full—quite full.”

“I shall not take your money, Sir, indeed,”—(after some altercation)—“Well child (said he) I’ll tell you what I’ll do—I will give you three guineas and take your eclogues into the bargain?” Ob-

Observe the conscience of this man, Lucy.—You may be sure I rejected his offer with disdain.—At last—after a thousand words, he said, “ Well—I must draw my purse-strings for once—Here’s five guineas for you.”

My circumstances being in a desperate state, I acquiesced. I could indeed have said, with the poor apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*,

“ My *poverty*,

“ But not my *will* consents.”

He walk’d off with his *booty*, I may call it,—and I thought I observ’d a glance of pleasure in his eye, for his good morning’s work.

I am amaz’d.—Bless me, my dear, I was assur’d by Mr. Barlow, whose taste and judgment in matters of literature is great, that the least I could expect for my two volumes of poems would be thirty guineas.—And yet, poor as this pittance of five is, which

F 6

I have

I have just receiv'd, there is something sweet in reaping the fruits of one's own industry.—Perhaps I shall have better luck with my next performance.

I have now, however, paid Mrs. Baxter for her rent.—I am sorry, my dear, I gave you a hint that I did not much like this woman:—but one is so mightily apt to give one's opinion!—She indeed behaves with so much kindness, that I cannot help esteeming her, and really I believe her a very good woman: never more will I pretend to form judgments of people again.

I have just receiv'd a most kind proof of Mrs. Baxter's friendship.—She came to me a few days ago, when I was writing over my poor tatter'd tragedy, and I gave her a short detail, what difficulties I had met with, for I made no sort of secret that I have
nothing

nothing but my *pen* for my support*.

In consequence of this information, the kind woman has just been with me, to tell me she has a lady (an excellent, elderly gentlewoman it seems) who lodges here, whose husband (for she is a widow I understand) was particularly acquainted with Lord B——, one of the most eminent noblemen of the age in encouraging letters, and patronizing the learned.—He is also one of the best of men, Mrs. Baxter tells me.—“Do, dear Miss Belton,” said she, “let me introduce you to good Mrs. Peers,—her husband was an author—and this excellent Lord made his fortune. He is the man, this very nobleman is the proper person to patronize your tragedy.—How stupid

* Those who are experienced in the ways of the world, will surely think our heroine imprudent in disclosing her affairs to strangers; but her heart was pure *simplicity* itself, and unsuspecting innocence.

was I not to think of Lord B—— before ! Let me, dear Miss Belton, introduce you as soon as possible to good Mrs. Peers."

I very willingly accepted her kind offer you may be convinced, and an hour hence, I am to go to the lady.

* * * * *

I have seen Mrs. Peers, my dear, with whom I am delighted :—quite a grave *matronly*, good kind of woman. She receiv'd me with kindness, and has promis'd me her utmost assistance in recommending my play, and all my performances of the pen, to this worthy nobleman.

" My excellent, old friend," said Mrs. Peers, " for alas ! he is now advanced in life, ought to have his name written in letters of gold.—My poor Mr. Peers, I am sure, abundantly reap'd the fruits of his generosity ;—for he settled a very handsome pension
upon

upon him for life,—and since his death I still enjoy it.—(How noble is this, my Lucy, in Lord B——!)—But I should never have done (she continu'd) were I to tell you of his beneficence to distressed merit in the literary way.—I will engage, Miss Belton, he brings your play on the stage this very next season.—He is the man you should apply to.—My poor child,” continued this humane lady, a tear glistening in her eye; “you shall have no more trouble with the *friend's friend* of the *manager's*, and all that uncertain kind of recommendation:—here you see, your business is done at once: you have nothing to do, but to get yourself ready, by twelve o'clock, to-morrow noon, and put your play in your pocket, and I will introduce you to the worthiest of men.—Have you no friends in town?”—I replied no.—“Poor young creature,”—she exclaim'd,—“how I pity you!—How lucky

lucky am I, in having an opportunity to serve you!"

I endeavour'd to express my gratitude.

"Say nothing of it," said she.—
"Come, you and Mrs. Baxter shall drink tea with me this afternoon."

Mrs. Baxter now enter'd, and I spent an agreeable afternoon.—The whole conversation of the ladies turn'd upon the goodness, genius, and exalted virtues of Lord B——. Indeed, my Lucy, I rejoice to hear that my intended patron is so *good* a man, and that he is advanced in years.—Had he been a young libertine, I should have been afraid of *such* a *patron*, but now I can have no fears.

* * * * *

Thursday.

Well, my Lucy, I have made my visit this day at noon to Lord B——,
with

with Mrs. Peers, and was most graciously receiv'd.—But to lead to it.

I dress'd as neatly as I could, and with my play in my pocket, went in a coach with the above-mention'd good lady. We alighted at a magnificent house, and were conducted upstairs into an elegant library, where we found the worthy nobleman in an arm'd-chair, with his legs laid up, in a fit of the gout, and enjoying all the *dignity* of that disorder.

My conductress introduced me, with saying, “Here is the young person, my lord, of whom I spoke to you about.”

His lordship survey'd me with attention; and very politely desir'd me to be seated. Conversation soon turn'd on literature, and I had the satisfaction of finding that what I said with regard to poetry, &c. met with approbation. I shall pass over here, my dear, the compliments lord B——
made

made to my uncommon talents, as he was pleas'd to call them.—I presented my play, which on glancing his eye over,—“ I see,”—said he, “ I see enough to assure you it shall be brought on the stage the ensuing season. Make yourself perfectly easy, as to that matter:—your genius is of the first rate on my word.—You appear very young, and to write in this manner, at so early an age, is really surprizing.—How old, pray, may you be ?

“ Almost eighteen, my lord.”

“ Good lack—but eighteen !” he exclaim'd ; “ a great genius !—a great genius !—My good friend here, Mrs. Peers, has told me a little of your history, which has much prejudiced me in your favour.—Your education must have been very extraordinary.—Is your father living ?”

Lord B——, my Lucy, spoke with so much friendship, that I was affected.—I felt a tear stealing down my
cheek;

cheek ; which I thought his lordship observ'd.—He rang for chocolate,—and the remainder of our visit pass'd very agreeably.—He related many little anecdotes of the present wits of the age ; and indeed, seems himself to have a great deal of wit and humour.—He certainly is an agreeable man, and though far advanced in years, possesses much chearful spirit.

When we arose to come away,—“ Mrs. Peers,” said my lord, “ I insist on your dining with me to-morrow, and bring your young authoress with you.—I thank you very heartily for such an acquisition as her *genius* will be to me.—I shall have no company to-morrow, but two or three literary friends—but we will not distress this fair lady so much to read her play before her :—we will not hurt her delicacy by hearing her own praises.”

I blush'd—and replied, “ I thank
your

your lordship for your kind consideration.—I have indeed heard that for an author, or authorefs, to fit by and hear their play read, is almost as bad as being under the torture of the inquisition.”

My lord fmiled, and soon after we took our leave.

* * * * *

Friday night.

I cannot fufficiently exprefs my prefent happinefs :—neither can I fleep this night, till I have given the friend of my heart an account of my fuccefs this day at Lord B——’s, when my play was read before five of the literati.—But firft I fhould tell you, my good Mrs. Peers, (who riles in my efteem every moment) and I, arriv’d at my patron’s, juft before dinner, three gentlemen were prefent, whom by their fpare habit, fhabby-genteel drefs, and (to ufe an expreffion of my book-feller)

seller) *cadaverous* aspect, I easily guess'd were *poor brother* authors. They were in their behaviour *bumble* to excess.—The dinner was elegant, and my lord was wheel'd in his gouty chair to sit at table. I am naturally, you know, my dear, timid; but really his lordship behav'd to me with such friendly politeness, that my bashful backwardness, in joining in the conversation, by degrees subsided; and my opinion (for the conversation was wholly literary) was ask'd of some very important passages of ancient tragedy. My Lord appear'd beyond measure delighted with my sentiments.—He drank my health—and loaded my plate with fruit from the desert.—I found my play was not to be read till the arrival of two more gentlemen; they however did not arrive till after tea; they appear'd to be both of the same *cast* and *colour* as the three others, who I found were all authors.

“Well,”

“ Well,” said his lordship smiling,
—“ we will now (producing my play)
proceed to business.”

“ Ah ! my Lord,” said I trembling,
“ you promis’d I should not be present
at the reading.”

“ You little simpleton (answer’d
he) you have nothing to fear,—these
are all friends.—Your play has so
much merit, that criticism is out of the
question.”

Well, my dear, to be brief, the
play was read. Imagine your poor
little Fanny surrounded by five au-
thors, and Lord B—— at their head.
I shall only say during its reciting, I
would *not* undergo such another two
hours for both the Indies;—but in
fact my fears were groundless : never
was such an inundation of compli-
ments as I receiv’d on all sides.—
They all *affected* (for I have not vanity
enough to think, in reality, I deserv’d
their praises) to be in raptures with
my

my performance. One said, "the fable was naturally conducted, and the incidents interesting:" — another "that the characters were beautifully contrasted, and well supported:" a third, "that the language was poetical, spirited, and correct, and that the unities of the drama were maintain'd with the most scrupulous exactness:" — a fourth said, "the opening was gradual, the peripeteia surprising, and the catastrophe affecting." — In short, they judg'd it by the laws of Aristotle and Horace, and I was perfectly overwhelm'd with their praises.

"And what says your Lordship (says one) you, my lord, who are the perfect *Mæcenas* of the age?" "I say (said he) this girl, gentlemen, of eighteen years only, is the wonder of the age."

I really could hear no more. — I begg'd a truce with compliments.

"Well," said his Lordship, "you have,

have, Miss Belton, gain'd immortal honour.—I take your cause into my own hands; and be assur'd I will bring your play on the stage this season, and be a *careful nurse* to it."

We soon after took our leave. Lord B—— whisper'd Mrs. Peers, but on what account I know not. In three days I am to wait again on his lordship with all the poetry, essays, &c. &c. I ever wrote. In good truth, my dear, my brain is almost turn'd, by all these flattering appearances.—Seriously, my vanity is most extremely flatter'd :—and then the noble friendship of this worthy lord!—I cannot now want a protector.—You see I am in the high road of being a celebrated authoress. After all, Lucy, is this not a better prospect than to be sitting poring till midnight stitching caps and ruffles?—In short, I dedicate myself to literature and the muses; and doubt not but I shall meet with all
due

due encouragement.—My father was right:—he knew the extent of my genius: he knew—but no more on this subject.—Fye—fye—I ought to scratch out these effusions of *vanity*.—But on second thoughts,—let them go to the friend of my soul, that she may read the secret workings of my heart.—In a word, guess my situation, when I may reasonably expect (my good lord tells me) to clear six hundred pounds at least, by my tragedy.

You see, my dear, I am at length happy;—but high as my spirits are, and flattering as my prospects appear, I will at present close this tedious epistle; for indeed it is high time I should give *you* a little respite, as well as my *pen*, after it has assur'd my dearest friend that

I am most

sincerely her's,

F. B.

VOL. II.

G

LET-

L E T T E R XXIV.

Dec. 10.

I AM just return'd, my friend, from spending with Mrs. Peers a very agreeable afternoon at the house of my noble patron, who promises me the utmost success in the productions of my pen.

On my return home to my lodgings, I have been extremely surpriz'd at an incident which has happen'd here, during my absence. No less, my dear, than that I miss a large trunk out of my bed-chamber.—I am indeed astonish'd, as I am convinced no person can have been in the apartment but honest Ruth, (Mrs. Baxter's maid) with whom I left a charge, that she should clean my room in my absence; for which purpose, I left the key of it to the care of Mrs. Baxter herself.—The instant I enter'd my apartment, I saw the trunk gone.—Bless me,

me, my dear, what shall I do?—I have in fact lost all my cloaths, but barely what I have on my back.—Think of my losing my whole little neat wardrobe, in which were two handsome negligees that were made up during my abode with Mrs. Welwood, and twenty very smart appendages of dress; which as I always visited with that lady, were then necessary, and indeed now extremely so.—But what is worse than all the rest, I had deposited my small stock of cash, and the little brilliant ring of my dear Mrs. Barlow in this trunk, which is now lost for ever.—I remember one day, when Mrs. Baxter was in my room, I shew'd her the trimming of my negligee, and also my diamond ring, and some other matters, and she saw me lock them all up in my trunk.—Another day, she saw me put my purse in the same place.—But, Heavens I have not—

cannot have the least shadow of a suspicion of Mrs. Baxter, who is greatly above so base an action.—No—Ruth, notwithstanding her sanctified look, must either be the thief, or accessory to the robbery.—It is really a very serious affair—which you will believe, when I tell you I have only a solitary six-pence in the world.

* * * * *

I have just call'd up Mrs. Baxter, and inform'd her of the above strange incident.—She profess'd great astonishment, and said she knew nothing ever of what effects, or boxes, belong'd to her lodgers;—that some idle persons might possibly slip up stairs, &c. as to her own servant, her honesty was *incorruptible*:—with a great deal more to the same purpose.—Ruth I also summon'd, and very strictly examin'd her. She most vehemently asserted her innocence; and with the most solemn imprecations,

8

denounced

denounced ruin on her head, if she knew a tittle of the matter.

But not to trouble you with the many questions I ask'd, and the answers given, suffice it to say, I can get no sort of intelligence in this most vexatious affair, from either mistress or maid.—Some persons would, perhaps, on this occasion, get a search warrant:—but what can such a young helpless woman as I do, in a matter of this nature?—In short, however mortifying and vexatious this most severe loss is to me, I must e'en sit down under it.—Indeed, I am almost distracted at the thoughts of having lost not only my almost whole stock of apparel, but the little money I had also, the produce of my poems. These are trials beyond the patience of a Socrates to bear. I am endeavouring, however, on this heavy calamity, to muster up all the wise maxims of my old favorite philosophers

G 3

phers and authors, who have said so much in favour of *poverty*.

What strange mortals we are!—I think I concluded my last letter to my Lucy in vaunting of my happiness.—Pitiable pride!—Well—I have no remedy but *patience*.

I am extremely surpriz'd I have not yet been favour'd with a line from my ever-rever'd Mr. Barlow.—But here comes good Mrs. Peers.—I throw down my pen.

Kind woman!—The above lady, my dear, having heard of my great and recent loss, came to condole with me, and to offer me her assistance; she said, if her purse could be of any service, as she had heard I had not only lost my cloaths, but my money.

“Come,”—said she most generously, “my dear Miss Belton, let me persuade you to give me leave to lend you these ten guineas.—Or here's a twenty pound note.—You know, child,

child, you cannot go on without cash."

"My good Madam,"—exclaim'd I, putting back the money,—“I cannot, indeed I cannot borrow money, when I know not I may ever have an opportunity of repaying it.—I would not incur a debt, I am sure, for the world.—Indeed, dear good Madam, you must excuse me.”

“Well,”—said she, tapping my cheek,—“never did I hear of such a little scrupulous simpleton.—As to repaying me, do it just when you please:—or if never, I shall be amply satisfied, in the pleasure of assisting so much innocence in distress.”—Was not this generous, my Lucy?—“Besides, (she continu'd) you talk of not having it in your power to repay;—do you forget that you will very soon gain six or seven hundred pounds by your charming tragedy?—come, child, let me persuade you.—Take ten guineas.”

neas." — "No, indeed, Madam." —
"Well, five." — I still persisted in my refusal, — though conscious I had only one fix-pence in my pocket. — I thought she seem'd rather displeas'd with my strange obstinacy, as she call'd it. —
"But well," she said, "my Lord B—— has just sent to desire we will drink tea with him to-morrow evening. — What will you do, child, about drefs? — You know my wardrobe is at your service, as well as my purse, which you are such a little obstinate girl to refuse."

"You are, Mrs. Peers," rejoin'd I, "goodness itself: — but as to drefs, I have, however, still remaining what I happen'd to wear upon the day I last waited on his lordship; — and by that means it was sav'd from this wreck I have had: — for indeed I had no other apparel, but what I have now lost, excepting what I then had on my back."

"Well,"

“ Well,”—said she, “ it is the most unaccountable robbery I ever heard!—As to the people of the house, they are of unblemish’d honesty.—You will be sure to be ready to-morrow to wait on his lordship.”—I told her most certainly,—and she withdrew.

Mrs. Baxter too has just been here to express her sorrow for my great loss; and to beg, if I am in present want of cash, as she says she understood I lost some money in this unfortunate robbery, that I will without ceremony give her leave to lend me five, or ten guineas*.—“ You are so good a young lady, (she continu’d) that I cannot bear the thought of your being in distress:—and if you don’t repay me this month, I shall be quite easy.”

* The reader may wonder at Mrs. Baxter’s kindness in offering to lend her lodger money; but her liberality will be accounted for very soon.

I express'd my acknowledgments in terms of gratitude for her kindness,—but you may be certain I would by no means accept of her offer.

I have this moment paid away my last six-pence for writing paper and pens, and a small loaf of bread, on which I shall subsist with resignation to my God, till I am in better circumstances. — Poverty, without the stings of guilt, is not, my Lucy, so great an evil.— The miseries and pleasures of this life, are indeed very ideal.

“ Fine philosophy ! (you cry) you may as well endeavour to persuade me, Fanny, that fire does not burn, water wet us, or affliction render us miserable.”

I cannot at present, child, enter into a minute dissertation on your observation.—I am just going to begin a little work, which I shall entitle the *Life of Lewis Cornaro*, of famous memory ; whose doctrine, I suppose
you

you may have heard, consisted in recommending the most *rigid abstinence*, and a course of *fasting*, for all those who wish'd to arrive at old age,—of which he was a most memorable proof.

* * * * *

I am just return'd from my visit to Lord B——, which I mention'd to you, when I dated last, I was to make this evening. I am, my dear friend, a little surpriz'd at a few circumstances I observ'd in his lordship's behaviour, which I own, at the time, I thought *odd*;—and yet, perhaps, it meant nothing—could mean nothing—and is merely the result of my own foolish whims and fancies:—but you shall judge.

Before, however, I mention anything *particular* in my lord's behaviour, I should say we had hardly got there five minutes, but a servant brought

Mrs. Peers a seal'd note, which he said was just brought by a messenger booted and spurr'd, who waited for an answer.—On her reading this note, she exclaim'd, “O good Heavens! my poor niece at Hampstead, is taken dangerously ill, and requests my immediate presence.—I must beg your lordship to excuse me.—I must instantly attend the dear creature.—It is her first child—I dread the consequence.—Do, dear Miss Belton, read the contents, with his lordship's leave aloud, for I really am in such a flurry of spirits—Good Heavens! what a sad affair!”

“Come,” said my lord, “read this dreadful note, Miss Belton.—What is the matter?”

The note ran thus:

“Mr. Simpson's affectionate love to his honour'd aunt Peers, and is extremely sorry to inform her, that
his

History of FANNY BELTON.

his dear wife (her beloved niece) been this day unhappily overtaken in our carriage.—She has been ever since in strong fits—and it is apprehended, that her labour pains are coming on.—I am almost frantic with my fears.—Hasten, dearest Madam—hasten immediately to your afflicted niece, and almost distracted nephew,

Peter Simpson.”

P. S. I need not beg you, I hope, to come away this moment.

Hampstead, two o'clock.

“ I must—I must set out, (said Mrs. Peers) your lordship, I know, will have the goodness to excuse all ceremony.—O if I should lose my sweet niece Kitty, I should run distracted.”

“ I am very sorry,” said my lord; —“ but the sooner you set out the better, as the poor lady is in such danger.

danger.—My chariot shall carry you directly.”—He rang the bell, and gave orders for it.—I took up my hat and cloak.

“ I will,” said I, “ beg the favour of you, Madam, to set me down at Mrs. Baxter’s.”

“ No, indeed,” said she, “ child, that is impossible; it is entirely the contrary road; and surely you would not hinder me a moment on this most urgent occasion.—Besides, you would not be so rude, I hope, to leave his lordship alone, an invalid as he is:—for goodness sake, stay and make tea;—fye, Miss Belton, you must not indeed think of leaving his lordship till after tea.—As to me, I must run this moment, I cannot stay to drink tea:—I must go this instant to my lodgings, at which place your lordship’s chariot may take me up.”—Saying which, after proper compliments, she departed.

I felt

I felt myself excessively awkwardly Lucy, in being left with this noble man—(who, I should have said, had join'd with Mrs. Peers in desiring me to stay)—and yet certainly there could be no impropriety in my staying to make tea, on the footing of that friendly intimacy we were upon:—and yet, fool that I was,—I fear'd I knew not what.—During tea, his Lordship, I thought, made me more compliments than I had ever heard from him.—When our tea was over, he took from his pocket a poem I have lately written—entitled an Ode to Friendship.

“ Miss Belton,” said he, “ I am charm'd with your ode.—But permit me to say, I must criticise a little on this performance; notwithstanding I am enchanted with many lines;—but, surely, you have made *too* great a *distinction* between *friendship* and *love*: you seem to think them *distinct* things.”

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“Are

are they not, my lord?" said I blushing.

"No surely,"—he replied with quickness.—"Friendship is love—and love is friendship.—There can—nay there should be no reserves.—Take heed my sweet girl (I started Lucy) where you bestow your friendships—(he took my hand)—that whole *heaven* of beauty of your's—those eyes—this lovely hand, is all the prize of friendship."

I withdrew my hand, and with some spirit replied, "I shall take care, my Lord, how I ever bestow my friendship on those who will make use of it to my prejudice.

"Nay," said he, somewhat disconcerted, I thought;—"Why, Miss Fanny, do you withdraw your hand?—you are not surely afraid of such a poor, old, gouty fellow as I am?—I am your friend—your true—your real friend.—Nay, as a proof I am so
in

in the strictest sense, I am excessively sorry to hear you have had a loss of so considerable a nature, as I find by my friend Mrs. Peers, who look'd in upon me yesterday, informs me."

"I did not know (said I, innocently) she had seen your Lordship since I did."

Here, again, I thought he seem'd disconcerted.

"But my dear Miss Belton (interrupted he) never was such a philosopher as you are!—Why your own favourite Epictetus could not bear a misfortune with a better grace.—But, seriously, child, I beg you will give me leave to assist you.—Here's a thirty pound note:—I will have no scruples,—no denials:—you cannot live in this town without money."

"No—no—my Lord," said I, putting back the note,—“indeed—I cannot accept it, indeed I will not.—I am extremely oblig'd, but positively

sively will not incur, to any person living, a debt of thirty pounds."

"Ridiculous, romantic girl, (said his lordship) what do you call a debt?—I am your friend;—and I bless heaven, have an ample fortune to succour the *distress'd*.—Can you support yourself without money?—What pretty philosophical nonsense have you got in your head, child, of living upon bread and water, in a *garret*?—Come—let me have your fine scheme—I suppose you are such a philosopher, you look upon *poverty* as *no evil*."

"Poverty, my Lord (said I, with some spirit) is by no means, I believe, the *greatest calamity*, no more than wealth the *greatest blessing*. God preserve me from more dreadful misfortunes, than that of being *poor*! I do not call *all* my resignation to my aid to support my late loss, heavy as it is to me.—But little wealth is wanting for the real necessaries of life,

life, when we are capable of annihilating imaginary wants.—As to your Lordship's offer'd kindness—indeed, I cannot accept it.”

“ You will find, Miss Belton, your bread and *water* scheme will not do.”

“ I can, surely, my Lord, support myself, on what thousands of poor wretches would think it even luxury to enjoy !”

At this moment the door open'd, and we heard a quality rap at the street door, and a carriage stop.—The door, as I say, open'd, and my lord's gentleman enter'd to inform him that his brother was just arriv'd from the north of England, and propos'd staying two or three days with him in his way to Bath.

Never did I, my Lucy, see a man so disconcerted as his Lordship was at this intelligence.—I might say he look'd as if *disappointed*; but of what, I cannot conceive. I heard him mut-
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ter

ter softly to himself—"Come now!—How unlucky!—Here (said he to the servant) call a chair for this lady,—run—fly.—My dear, Miss Belton, I must now bid you adieu for a day or two, till this *un*-look'd for visiter is gone."

He caught my hand and kiss'd it.—I snatch'd my hat and cloak, and bidding his Lordship a good-night, departed.—I did not see the stranger, as he had just been shewn into the parlour.—The servant put me in a chair, and attended me to my lodgings.—I need not say (what you will imagine) that he, according to his orders, discharg'd my chairmen, which was lucky, as I have not, at this present writing, six-pence in the world.

And now, my dear friend, what am I to think of this lord?—Possibly you will say I have had no real cause for my alarm:—but I own he is
greatly

greatly sunk in my opinion and esteem.—And yet, certainly, his offer of the bank note was generous.

You will ask me, perhaps, what it is that I think *strange* in his behaviour?

Why, my dear, I thought his notions of friendship *odd*, as well as his hurrying me away on the arrival of his brother.—For if this nobleman's friendship for me be of the disinterested kind, merely to serve a person in distress, why should it be a matter of secret from his relations?—There is certainly no crime in assisting the unfortunate: I am therefore astonish'd at the *confusion*, on my account, in which this *unexpected* visiter flung my patron.—This simple observation I instantly made:—possibly it might only proceed from that very simplicity; the simplicity of a girl bred in the midst of the mountains of Llandovery.

Heavens!

Heavens! my Lucy, if this man, after all, should have bad views—what then must I think of Mrs. Peers?—I shudder at the thought.—But avaunt these wicked suggestions!—I am, I fear, an ungrateful wicked girl, to dare to suspect without further proofs.—Once more be gone, then, unworthy doubts!—wrapt in my own conscious innocence, let me charitably conclude, there is honour and disinterested friendship still remaining in this bad world.—In this disposition of judging *candidly*, I bid my dear friend good night, and am her's very sincerely.

F. B.

L E T T E R XXV.

Dec. 20.

TEN days, my friend, have pass'd since I dated my last letter to you;—in which space even Lewis Cornaro himself could not exceed

ceed me in abstinence:—a crust or two of bread, and a little weak tea, have been my only support.—My spirits are hitherto wonderfully good,—and I have slept sweetly these two nights.—You remember the old song,

“ No coin in the pocket,

“ No care in the pate,” &c.

You see, my dear, I am in good spirits—notwithstanding I am in the same regimen of *diet*, in which so many poor authors in this great town are condemned to.

But what have we here?—Ruth with a letter! it is Lord B——’s hand-writing:—The servant, she says, waits for an answer.—What can be the contents?—Imagine my impatience.

* * * * *

O my dear, what a dreadful precipice have I escap’d!—what a horrid, shocking monster is this vile lord!—
and

and what a deep, deep-laid, premeditated scene of villainy has been plotted for your poor innocent Fanny! But read—read yourself, his abominable letter, in which is contain'd an infamous propofal, wrote on parchment, in a lawyer's hand.

THE LETTER.

My charming Miss Belton has too much discernment, I flatter myself, not to observe, when I had last the happiness of seeing her, with what difficulty I restrain'd my tongue from uttering the passionate wishes of my heart,—of a heart devoted to her alone.—Yes, most lovely of your sex, I adore you:—I can no longer restrain a declaration of my passion, which is the natural effect of beauty like your's.—My life, my fortune, are at your command.—I will be so ingenuous to say, I do not mean marriage,—according to the *vulgar* acception

ception of that hacknied state:—
 but I mean to live with my adorable
 Fanny the life of *honour*, mutually
 blessing and bless'd, in the entire
union of hearts. Your *understanding*,
 so greatly superior to all your sex,
 will, I trust, lead you to look on my
 offer in the advantageous light it is
 intended; and your heart (fraught
 with the tenderest compassion) will, I
 equally trust, *feel* for the misery of
 the man who cannot support life,
 without his adorable Miss Belton.—
 I have enclos'd a bond, drawn by
 my attorney,—in which I settle on
 you for life five hundred pounds per
 annum.—You will have an elegant
 villa at Hampstead;—a compleat set
 of servants at your command, distinct
 from mine;—and a coach, &c. for your
 entire use.—O my angel, be so di-
 vinely good to let me know your de-
 termination, for on that depends the

total happiness, or misery, of your passionate admirer,

and devoted

B——.

P. S. I enclose a bank bill for a hundred pounds, which I most earnestly beg you will accept:—I am pierced to the soul, when I imagine you must be at this moment reduced to difficulties.—O let your *friend*—the *friend* of your soul—render your future life happy, as *love* and *wealth* can make it!

Lucy, are you not almost petrified with horror!—I may indeed say with Shakespeare's Juliet, "*Ancient Iniquity!*" O the vile dotard—I see—I see now the whole plot:—he to say "he is pierced to the soul, when he imagines I am reduced now to difficulties!"—Wicked—wicked man!—I have not the least doubt but the well-concerted robbery scheme was
his,

his, to bring me into difficulties, of which he was to take the advantage.—But I hasten to send a final answer to his detestable proposals.

Here then, read my answer, in which I shall return him enclos'd, torn in a thousand pieces, his horrid letter and proposals.

My LETTER is this.

My Lord,

Nothing can equal my astonishment for your infamous letter, and scandalous proposals, but the abhorrence and contempt I have for the vile man, who could dare to send them:—be assur'd, I most heartily despise both you and your offers.—My *understanding*, which you ridiculously *compliment*, at the expence of the *rest of my sex*, and the *discernment* you mention, are, indeed, quite *equal* to discover to me the whole of your despicable plot, and do likewise

H 2

reveal

reveal to me *clearly*, the cause of those difficulties which, your lordship says, *pierce* you to the soul.—Fye, my lord—I blush that human nature should have recourse to such *mean* stratagems, to gratify its *meanest* passion!—I return your bank bill,—and hope you will put it to a better purpose, than to corrupt an helpless, innocent girl, in future.—As to myself, I am, I thank God, *virtuous*. I see perfectly your whole detestable design, and you will never excite other sentiments than the most sovereign contempt, in your much abus'd

F. B.

I seal'd up the wretch's odious bill, with the torn fragments of his insolent proposals, in the above letter,—and sent it off immediately.—I then fell on my knees, and return'd Heaven thanks for enabling me to
act

act as I have done, in preserving my innocence: after which I sat down, with joyful thankfulness, to my dinner, on a dry crust, and a glass of water.—No conqueror, my Lucy, ever exulted in his triumphs so much as I do, in my preservation from this vile man.—I feel I have acted *right*:—and oh what a *sweet* reflection is that to my soul!

Ah! my dear, can one be surpriz'd to see such numbers of poor young women perishing in the streets, when such deep—deep-laid plots are laid for helpless innocence!

I now apprehend, had it not been for the *timely* interruption of the visiter, the other evening, at the house of this wicked wretch, I should have been *then* irrevocably lost.

Merciful Heaven! by what a chain of minute circumstances, unseen by human eye, dost thou protect the innocent!

You may be certain I will quit this house immediately.—This Mrs. Baxter, I doubt not, is an associate with that vile Mrs. Peers, who has not yet return'd from her *pretended* jaunt to Hampstead.—Her *business* with me, I suppose she imagines, is now *finish'd*.

You will say, how can I get out of this *now* odious house, without money?—why, as my very last resource, I must sell what linnen I have.—I will take off likewise the gown on my back, and dispose of that too—and equip myself, in its stead, with an old tatter'd crape.

I have made up my bundle, and am just going to set out, to sell its contents.

O my friend, join with me in acknowledging the astonishing hand of Providence!—'Tis well—'tis well if I don't run mad with joyful surprize.—As well as I am able, take the happy event, in a few words.

I was

I was just stepping out at the street door, with my bundle under my arm,—when the post-man that moment stopp'd, and gave me a letter, after having ask'd if a Miss Belton lodg'd here.—It was *frank'd*, which was a lucky circumstance for your *then* pennyless friend.—Imagine my joy, when I saw the name of my dear and worthy Mr. Barlow! I flew up again to my apartment, to read the contents, but guess—guess my astonishment, when I read the following words!

Pengelly, Cornwall.

My good Miss Belton,

Your kind letter would have long since been answer'd, with all due thanks, but I have had the gout in my right hand:—and I am in hopes the good news I have to impart, will, in some measure, compensate for the anxiety I fear my silence has occasion'd.

sion'd. Be not griev'd, my dear child, for your dismissal at Welwood Abbey:—you see, *sincerity*, in *this* world, does not always meet its due reward. I long to know your present situation.—You have endur'd *adversity* like a *heroine*, I doubt not, (if adversity has been your lot;) but let us now see, how you, my good girl, will bear prosperity.—Not to keep you in suspense, know then that my wife purchas'd a ticket in the late lottery,—half of which ticket she intended for you, my dear child:—the joint ticket is drawn a prize of five thousand pounds.—I most heartily therefore congratulate you on the acquisition of two thousand five hundred pounds.—You have nothing further to do, but to take this letter with you to a Mr. Darby, in Ruffel-street, my agent and particular friend.—He receives a letter from me by this post, concerning this matter, and will wait
on

on you to the banker's, where your money is deposited.—May Heaven bless you with it, my good child!—If I might advise, I think you had better purchase an annuity with one thousand of your sum,—and the rest dispose of some other way.—But Mr. Darby will manage all that matter for you.—Remember, you owe me no thanks for this event.—It was entirely my Harriet's thought to purchase this lucky ticket:—I disclaim all merit in the affair.—The above dear woman joins with me in every affectionate wish, and believe me, my good Miss Belton,

Your very sincere friend,

Edward Barlow.

See—see, my Lucy, the amazing hand of Providence in this event!—It seems, if I may be allow'd to judge, as the immediate reward from the Father of all mercies, for my strict

H 5 adherence

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Edward Barlow.

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H 5 adherence

adherence to *virtue* in the most trying scenes of poverty.

“ Great God ! thou, who from the
“ lowest depths of misery, can raise,
“ and exalt thy poor creatures to ease
“ and affluence, O teach me to bear the
“ amazing change with humility :—
“ dispose my heart to assist every suffering
“ object.—To thy unerring
“ guidance I commit my inexperienced
“ steps !”

I am this instant going, my friend, to Mr. Darby's, and from thence to receive my money at the Banker's.—Gracious heaven is it possible ?—Ah ! my Lucy, let never those despair who trust in virtue !

I will here conclude this epistle ; and as soon as I am settled in another lodging, you shall have the most early account from your very

happy and faithful,

F. B.

L E T-

L E T T E R XXVI.

Dec. 23.

BEHOLD me, my beloved friend, settled in a comfortable, neat lodging, in the very next house to good Mr. and Mrs. Darby.—I will now give you a short recital of my story, from the time I finish'd my last letter.

According to Mr. Barlow's direction, I waited on his friend:—I was immediately admitted to his presence, and receiv'd by him and his amiable wife (who were just sitting down to their tea) with great respect.—Mr. Barlow,—good man!—had by acquainting them with the heads of my birth and education, &c. entirely *pav'd* the way for the kind reception I met with.

The good old gentleman immediately ordered his chariot, and we set out for the banker's, at whose house

H 6

your

your *late poor distressed* Fanny receiv'd her two thousand five hundred pounds! — On our way back, I inform'd Mr. Darby I was indebted a guinea at my late lodging, and begg'd, as our road lay through the street where it was, that he would set me down there. I also candidly inform'd him of the stage I had met with in regard to my loss of a diamond ring, and of my wearing apparel, in the house of Mrs. Baxter, whom I believ'd to be a bad woman. When I had finished my story—"Set you down there! (said the worthy Mr. Darby) no young lady—I will myself see this woman you mention, and likewise see if I can recover your effects. — Such a wretch shall not escape with impunity.—She shall refund you your effects, as they were left in charge with her, or I will get immediately a warrant to search her house.—The brilliant diamond ring you describe I well remem-

remember on the hand of your justly-lamented friend Mrs. Barlow.—To tell you the truth, Miss Belton, (continu'd he smiling) *I* presented her with that *very* ring.—She was, you must know, my *first love*:—but, from an unforeseen accident, the match was broke off.—Was there not a little heart on the top of the largest diamond, with this remarkable inscription round the ring? — “ *a lover's gift.* ”

“ There was, Sir,” I replied.

“ The same—the same,” —cried he. —“ You, my good young lady, you shall have justice amply done you. This wicked woman shall restore you not only the ring, but every other of your effects, if there is justice to be found on earth.”

Lucy, whilst this excellent man was speaking, methought, he appear'd like an angel sent from heaven to my relief.—“ Gracious God!” I men-

tally prayed, “who never fails to assist those who place their whole dependance on *thee*, make me thankful for thy unbounded mercies !”

We now stopp'd at Mrs. Baxter's, alighted, and without ceremony, immediately went into her parlour.—She was at her tea, with two ladies, *Ruth* attending. The very first object that presented itself to my sight, was my ring on her finger. Mr. Darby instantly saw it too, and immediately lock'd the door:—when, advancing sternly, to the wicked woman, he told her a search-warrant was that instant at hand.—“You have robb'd this young woman,” said he; “that ring on your finger I will swear to.—A constable shall carry you this moment to Sir John Fielding's.”

The authoritative tone in which this was utter'd,—with the entire detection of her guilt,—the surprise she was thrown into—in short, all together,

ther, the wicked Baxter, was struck with the horror of her approaching fate,—and she had nothing left for it, but to fall directly on her knees, and confess the whole horrid affair.—She owned she had been brib'd by a certain nobleman and Mrs. Peers, to distress me for certain reasons;—but that she would refund every article, and hoped we would have mercy on an unfortunate woman. She deliver'd up the ring, and opening a closet door, order'd the affrighted Ruth to draw forth my trunk, in which I saw every article I had before lost. Mr. Darby persisted she should be prosecuted;—but as the woman scream'd for mercy,—and in fact I had lost *nothing*, (no thanks though to her evil *intention*)—and as a prosecution would have been attended with much inconvenience to me, I thought it best to let the matter rest where it was.—You will accuse me, I fear, as

I does

does Mr. Darby, of weak lenity to this bad woman:—but, indeed, I cannot bear to *commence* my state of *prosperity* with *hanging* a fellow-creature;—for that, I imagine, would have been her fate, if I had prosecuted the wretch.—I therefore leave her to the stings of her own guilt.—My worthy friend gave her a most severe lecture, which made her shudder.—But not to dwell on this disagreeable scene.

After I had sent off in a coach all my luggage to Mr. Darby's house, whose owner kindly desir'd me so to do, we return'd there.—A genteel supper was soon serv'd up. It was to me a most welcome repast, as your poor Fanny, was in great need of some seasonable food, having had nothing to support nature, but a dry crust, and a cup of water, for several days.

These kind people insisted (as the friend
friend

friend of Mr. Barlow) that I would spend that night at their house; and Mrs. Darby said, she would procure me the next day a proper lodging at the next house. After supper, I gave these truly good friends, at their desire, a minute detail of Lord B——'s behaviour,—his abominable offers, and all that followed.

“Vile wretch!” exclaim’d Mr. Darby—“I know something of his character:—it is infamous. He has two or three seraglios, as he calls them, in the environs of this metropolis.—But my good Miss Belton, he only *assum’d* a taste for poetry and literature, in order to recommend, or rather to give him a pretext for your visits as an *authoress* (for such Mr. Barlow informs me you are, as well as your own account)—it was to serve his own vile ends to you, that he appear’d in the light of a patron of literature: in fact, it was a borrow’d character
he

he put on to abuse your innocence, as literature was your favourite pursuit. — That set of authors, as you call them, who read your tragedy, were, I'll lay my life, no other than a gang of pimps,—creatures at his devotion, ready to aid him in his vile designs."

" Ah good Sir," exclaim'd I, " you make me shudder.—Gracious God! from what a precipice have I escaped!"

" A precipice indeed," rejoin'd he. " Were I to tell you half the schemes which are daily put in practice by men of large fortunes to ruin helpless innocence,

" I should a tale unfold

" Would harrow up your soul."

" How I shall be able to get the productions of my pen out of the hands of this wicked man," said I,

" I know not."

" That

“That shall be my care,”—said this excellent friend.—“Before to-morrow night they shall be in your possession.”

Was not this man, Lucy, sent by heaven to assist me?

Whilst we were talking, I observ'd a tear stealing down the venerable cheek of Mrs. Darby, who, as well as her husband, was far advanced in years.—He too observ'd her emotion: and rising from his chair, with more tenderness perhaps than would half the men in England, after a marriage of thirty years, address'd her with great affection.—“My dearest, what is the matter?—you are in tears!—are you ill?”

“I am not ill,” said she, “but—the features,—the voice,—the manner of this young lady—are so much like that of our poor Harriet,—who, if it had pleas'd heaven to have spar'd to this time, would have been much of
the

the same age.—Forgive me, Madam," said she to me, "but I must pay the tribute of a few tears to the memory of my poor child."—Mr. Darby said, the resemblance was so striking, it had affected him likewise.

I was conducted to an elegant apartment, where I enjoy'd a very sweet repose!—I stayed with these worthy people, at their entreaty, till a lodging could be procur'd for me; and luckily, in a few days, I was accommodated with one, in every respect very convenient, at the next door.

Mr. Darby has been this morning to Lord B—— for my play, and other productions of my pen. If you are desirous of knowing the result of the visit, I will give it you in a few words.

As Mr. Darby is a very eminent counsellor at law, and has frequently done business for this nobleman, he
was

was easily admitted to his presence. His Lordship receiv'd him very courteously, little imagining the *cause* of his visit.

“ I suppose, Mr. Darby,” said his Lordship, “ you are come about the
“ old story again.—What, your
“ client is now willing to make the
“ purchase of those glebe lands,
“ which he has been so long about ?”

“ I am come (said the good man, who has much dry humour) about no *glebe* lands. My *cause*, at present, is of a very different nature—a pretty girl, my lord, is the subject of my brief. But do not imagine from thence, my lord, that I am come in the honourable light of one who meant to contribute to your Lordship's pleasures,”—

“ My pleasures !” interrupted his Lordship, “ good Sir !—you joke.—A-lack-a-day—you joke to talk of a pretty girl and pleasures to one at my
time

time of life.—I grow old,—old apace, Mr. Darby.—Girls have no charms for me.—That is all over,—over long ago.—In my youthful days, I had my gaieties—but now—and indeed for many years, I have bid adieu to all those follies.—A future state;—a future state, Mr. Darby, is what I have been long preparing for.—But who is this girl you are speaking of?”

“ Her name is *Belton*, my lord.”

Here my friend, it seems, fix'd his old *penetrating* eyes on his Lordship, who, though practis'd in guilt, could not, however, avoid changing colour.—Mr. Darby proceeded.

“ A young lady, my Lord, who has had, a few days since, some proposals, of no delicate kind, made to her by a nobleman.”

“ This age, Mr. Darby,—this age is very corrupt.”

“ Vile hypocrite!” thought Mr. Darby,

Darby, but he suppressed his indignation.

“ I am come my lord,” said he, “ for a tragedy, and other poetical works of this young lady, which I understand you have in your possession.”

“ O aye (said his Lordship, hesitating) I think — I — I — remember something of the — the name — of such a young person. — She applied to me for interest with the manager: — but so silly a work would never be receiv’d. — Here, take all the trumpery together. If she had delayed sending for her fooleries a few days longer, I should have order’d my servants to light the fires with them.”

“ I understood,” said Mr. Darby, “ that these works met with your Lordship’s *highest* approbation. — But be that as it may, the virtuous girl has however no occasion now to write for bread, as she has just come into
the

the acquisition of a very genteel fortune."

"I know nothing of her (said his Lordship) or her circumstances.—I saw her once or twice.—She appear'd deplorably vain of her literary acquirements.—She knows a little—a very *little* Latin and Greek,—and is miserably self-conceited of that learning.—An author of some merit recommended her to me."

"An author," interrupted Mr. Darby, "I thought a Mrs. *Peers* brought her to your Lordship by your own desire.—But I suppose I must have been misinformed; as, on enquiry, I find she is a woman of an infamous profession:—and your Lordship having *so long* renounced all criminal pleasures,—and being so properly preparing, as you say, for a *future state*."

"Well—well—here are the papers.—I am now a little busy, Mr. Darby,

Darby, and will therefore bid you a good morning."

My friend withdrew, with no very favourable opinion of his Lordship's veracity, respecting either his declared renunciation of all criminal pleasures, or his preparations for a future state.

What a sad thing, my dear, for these great folks, that their wealth and titles cannot secure them from the censure of a prying world, and the secret *twitches* of a guilty conscience!

Never, surely, can I enough be thankful to the great Disposer of all events!—What a precipice have I escaped!—That vile *Peers*, it seems, is a woman of the most infamous character.—But not another word of these miserable wretches.—More pleasing subjects shall conclude this letter: and first for my great riches, which appear to me quite inexhaustible.

My worthy friend has purchas'd an annuity with one thousand—and the

other thousand is in the hands of a wealthy merchant, who will give me considerable interest.—The remaining five hundred is lodged with a banker, to be call'd for as occasion offers.—Such, my dearest friend, is the present state of your Fanny's finances.

You may imagine my joy at *re-gaining* my diamond ring, which I esteem above all things, as being the gift of my ever-valu'd Mrs. Barlow.

Adieu!—I have a hundred little matters to settle in my new habitation.

Ever your's most faithfully,

F. B.

✍ A space of time now pass'd of near three years, during which Miss Belton still continu'd, as before, writing to her friend; but as the letters contain nothing sufficiently material to engage the attention of the reader, they are omitted. It is, however,

ever, necessary to observe, that the following incidents happen'd in that interval: The death of her good friend, Mr. Darby, and the marriage of her beloved correspondent at Madras:—also, that she had been acquainted (by lodging in the same house, for the last six months) with a gentleman, whose name was Benson; a man of letters, &c. and who had, for some time, of which she had inform'd her friend, made her an offer of marriage. The next letter we shall present the reader is as follows.

L E T T E R XXVII.

London, April 3.

NEVER more, my dearest Lucy (for *Lucy* I still must call you though you have been a *wife* these twelve months, and may probably be a *mother* by this time) but never, I

I 2

repeat

repeat, did I ever wish for your counsel and advice so much as at this moment.—In my last letters *, for some months past, I have inform'd you that this (to give him his *due*) agreeable man—this Benson, is perpetually pestering me with his addresses.—I am *almost* inclin'd to put an end to them, by e'en taking him for *better for worse*. That I have not yet accepted his hand, is, because I cannot find in my heart that *extreme* of *tendernefs* which I imagine is absolutely necessary in an union so sacred, for life.—I certainly esteem Mr. Benson,—greatly esteem him,—nay, I admire his uncommon taste for literature,—his accomplishments in the polite arts,—and indeed look upon his knowledge and judgment to be very extensive:—but still, my dear, I do not *feel* that kind of *tendernefs* for Mr. Benson, I

* These letters appear not.

once did for——Ah! I need not write the name! your heart, which is a counterpart of mine, will dictate *who* I mean. Is this indifference of mine owing to the heart, which, it is said, can never be *deeply, truly touched* but once?

But you, my Lucy, tell me you are happy:—and yet you married, by your own account, without any great degree of that enthusiastic romantic passion, which often calls daggers and poison to its aid.—Perhaps, after all, respect and esteem may be the best foundation for real happiness in this state.—I think I shall try the expedient.—As to *tenderness*—I certainly, my dear, can truly say, I am not *in love* with Mr. Benson.—I see him without emotion, —I part without pain,—I never count the *hours* till he visits me again,—I sleep well,—and I never sigh.—I am ready sometimes to ask, “Tell me, my heart, if this

174 *The WOMAN of LETTERS; or,*
be *love*? —A h, no! —'tis no such
matter.

“ But what are his circumstances?”
you ask.

Why, my dear, nothing very extraordinary. He has candidly inform'd me of his affairs, and they stand thus: —At the death of an uncle I find he comes into the possession of a pretty estate in Essex, about two hundred pounds a year.—It is this uncle who has given him the very liberal education he has had, and who also allows him a very genteel stipend, which, with a post he holds in one of the public offices, enables him to live very comfortably.—As to fortune, my dear, I really think, if *we do* come together, our circumstances will enable us to live, with good management, very decently.

I have as candidly inform'd my gentleman of the particulars relating to my own money-matters.—This I
thought

thought proper to do, lest he should be deceiv'd by appearances, and imagine me a woman of larger fortune than in reality I am.—At the conclusion, he caught my hand, and kissing it with transport, told me, it was my *mind* not my *purse*, that was the object of his attention.

I think I told you, my Lucy, in a former letter, that the person of this man is very agreeable.—He has quite the air of a man of fashion:—indeed more so, than one should suppose in a person of so moderate a fortune.—His passion for books, like my own, is extreme.—He understands musick perfectly well, and sings in a charming taste.—He appears frank,—good-humour'd, and benevolent.—Why have I not a heart to bestow on so much*merit?

My poor friend, Mrs. Darby, has been gone some months to reside at Canterbury with her relations.—She

will not long survive that best of men,
her excellent husband.—After having
liv'd forty years together mutually
dear,

“And each to each, a dearer self,”

what language, I say, can express
what the heart must *feel* in *such* a se-
paration?

* * * * *

I am just, Lucy, return'd from a
walk in the park. As I was in a so-
litary mood, I stay'd till the company
were chiefly gone, that I might enjoy
a reverie:—but, gracious heaven!
how was I both shock'd, and affected,
at the following incident!

As I was passing by Rosomon's
pond, I saw, sitting on the stump of
an old tree, in the most disconsolate
posture imaginable, a young woman
in very shabby apparel: though she
lean'd part of her face on her hand,
I ob-

I observ'd she was painted,—and from the tawdry, though tatter'd appearance she made, I at once saw she was a woman of the town.—As I look on many of them as the greatest objects of distress in nature, my heart involuntary sigh'd at the apparent misery of the poor wretch before me.—She appear'd as if totally absorbed in the most horrid gloom of despair.

I look'd on the miserable wretch with equal pitty and attention; when, advancing nearer to the spot on which she sat, she suddenly started.—I was now close to her, when looking steadfastly at her face, good God! what was my astonishment to see this deplorable object was no other than my cousin Caroline Grimston! I was almost petrified with wonder!—She fix'd her haggard eyes on mine, as if imploring pity, when recollecting me immediately, she gave a faint scream, exclaiming, “ O Heavens! are you

my cousin Fanny? Can it be?—O good God! hide me—hide me!”

I express'd equal astonishment.—
“Is it indeed possible that I now behold my cousin Caroline?—what—what—can be the cause of this most surprising—this most strange situation in which I now behold you?”

“Oh!” said the miserable creature, wringing her hands, “leave me—leave me to my fate.—There (pointing to the water)—there I will soon end all my guilt and misery.”

“My God (said I) forbear to talk in so shocking a manner.—Indeed your present appearance bespeaks great wretchedness;—but there is a merciful Power who will assist those who trust in him.—Here, take my salts, and endeavour to compose your spirits.—Tell me, Caroline, what sad chain of calamities has reduced you to this.—It is, I thank heaven, in my power to afford you some assistance.”

“Oh!

“ Oh ! (said she bursting into tears) you are an angel of goodness !— Assist such a wretch as me indeed !— what assist me !—who have so often treated you with such cruelty !—Ah, cousin Fanny, my mother has much to answer for on your account,—and indeed on mine ;—but she now suffers for it severely !

I repeated my desire that she would inform me what brought her into her present sad situation.

“ O no” —she cried—I never can—I cannot offend your ears with my horrid tale.—You are all goodness, innocence, and purity—(looking on me with a kind of half frantic air) but I am a guilty wretch,—polluted—sunk into the lowest abyss of perdition.”

“ I will (said I) administer balm to your wounded mind :—I will, as far as I am able, endeavour to relieve you.”

I gave her my arm to rise from the

ground,—and as there was a bench near, we went to it.—“Come, sit down, cousin Caroline (said I) and tell me your unhappy story.”—After much hesitation and many tears, she began this short, but miserable account of herself.

“It is now, I think, near five years since *our* cruelty, I must call it, drove you, my good cousin, from Grimston House.—Soon after my sister was address’d by Mr. H——, a neighbouring squire, whom you must remember.—They were soon married; and without entering into minute particulars, suffice it to say I was unhappily seduced by that gentleman’s brother.—But I must do my seducer the justice to acknowledge my seduction was more the effect of my own levity, and the shameful and dangerous opportunities my unworthy mother (so I must call her) permitted.—I say my *fall* was owing more to these causes,

causes, than to any arts or promises of marriage from my seducer.—But to be brief—he brought me to London, and I liv'd with him several months.——He however, at length, grew weary of me—and I, naturally extravagant, ran him extremely in debt.—At length we parted:—another, and another keeper succeeded;—for I had no other resource to fly to.—Bred in idleness, industry had no charms for me: and here I must cast a veil over my horrid life for the three last years,—in which I have been entirely—what is call'd, on the town:—the miserable victim of lust,—disease,—and famine. I am but lately discharg'd from the hospital, having been infected with a shocking distemper.—At length, worn out by vice—I came here—I will own the truth—I came here to put an end at once to all my miseries—and was just going to throw myself——”

“ No

“No more of that (interrupted I,) pray to heaven to give you grace to avoid so great a crime as rushing into your Maker’s presence.”

“Pray ! (said she,)—no—I am in no state of mind to pray :—despair—deep despair has taken the entire possession of my soul.—O my father !—his heart I’ve broke.—Yes—yes, ’twas my crimes that sent him to his grave.”

A shower of tears stopp’d here her tongue. —Imagine, my Lucy, how extremely I was shock’d at this dreadful tale.—My heart bled for her distress.—I took out my purse, in which I had five guineas, and I put them in her hand: “Take these,” said I, “and endeavour to get into some honest way to get your livelihood.”

The poor creature look’d at the money with a kind of frightful eagerness, crying “God bless you !” with an energy which pierced my heart —“I will do,” said I, “what I can
for

for you—what cloaths have you?—If you will give me a direction I will send you a parcel of linnen, &c.”

“Heaven reward you,”—cried she:—“almost every thing I have in the world, of apparel, is in *pawn*:—this old tatter’d garment I have on, I borrow’d from a fellow lodger in the same miserable hole with myself.”

She gave me her direction, which I wrote down with my pencil. Some horrid hole as she call’d it, I suppose, indeed. It is at a Mrs. Fetch’s, green-grocer, in Hog-Lane, St. Giles’s.—I then talk’d very seriously to her of the danger—folly—and wickedness, of the life of a common prostitute.—At parting I promis’d to send her a farther supply of a little more money to-morrow in the evening, and also an assortment of linnen, &c.—She wrung my hand, and most solemnly protested she would get out of her present deplorable state, by entering
ing

ing on an entire new course of life. After many solemn promises of amendment on her side, and encouragements to so good a work on mine, I left this unhappy creature to her own reflections.—I cannot express how much this incident has shocked me.—But no more of this melancholy subject.

* * * * *

O for the spear of *Ithuriel*, as describ'd by Milton, that I might, by a single touch, see the *real* situation of this lover's heart of mine.—Perhaps you will say, it is too late to talk of the spear of Ithuriel, when I have kept the poor man so long in suspense—and when from the whole tenor of his behaviour I see merit sufficient to entitle him to reward.

Well then—I think I shall e'en take him.—Indeed, I greatly require a friend—a protector.—A single woman;

man, my Lucy, without alliances, is a poor helpless being.

I am advis'd to go to Bath for the complaint I mention'd to you, in some * former letters, in my stomach:—I purpose setting out next week. —Adieu then for the present:

Believe me, most sincerely,

your's, F. B.

P. S. If I change my *name*, I shall not change the *initials* of it.—I have sent a small purse to the poor miserable Caroline; and also some necessary apparel:—she informs me she is going to set out for her sister's house in the country, whose favour she intends to implore.

L E T T E R XXVIII.

Bath, May 2.

MY last letter † told my dear friend that I had found much benefit at this place; and have in-

* These letters were written in the foregoing interval.

† This letter appears not.

deed

deed perfectly recover'd my usual good health.

My *importunate* lover came down above a fortnight ago.—*Importunate* I call him, as indeed he presses affairs to a conclusion, with almost an irresistible impetuosity.—Certainly, my dear, if I do really intend to marry this man (and indeed I believe him to be very worthy) the sooner I am settled the better.

Mr. Benson, whose delicacy of behaviour to me is among the number of his many other very amiable qualities, does not lodge in this house; for as he is so eternally with me every day, and indeed all the day, it might occasion suspicions on my character; and next to doing an imprudent action, we should avoid giving the most distant cause for censure.

* * * * *

I have met with a little incident
this

this afternoon, my Lucy, which has given me some uneasiness,—and yet the cause you will think absurd:—but you shall judge.—The gentleman where I lodge, whose name is Powel, (a very amiable good woman, recommended to me by Mrs. Darby) drank tea with me this afternoon. After chatting of different things, “Pray madam,” said she, “if it is not impertinent, may I ask the name of that gentleman who so often visits you?”

I should have told you, my dear, that my lover was this afternoon, as he tells me he has never been at Bath before, gone to take a ride on the delightful hills which surround the town.

“He is a gentleman,” continu’d Mrs. Powel, “with whose person I am intimately acquainted by sight, for I have, for several years past, in the seasons, frequently observ’d him about,
on

on the parade, with other gentlemen, though I cannot, at present, recollect his name.—It is, I know, a kind of foreign name—of three syllables.”

“ Pardon me, madam,” said I, “ but you must mistake the person :—the gentleman’s name is Benson ;—and he has never been at Bath before now.”

“ Mrs. Powel look’d at me, on my uttering this, with the utmost astonishment :—and after having been some moments silent, with a sort of earnest quickness, she ask’d me if I had been long acquainted with him.

“ O yes,” answer’d I, with a kind of half-smile, “ so long—that I believe I shall be acquainted with him, in a very short time, *for life*.” She said not a word more on the subject, — but I imagined seem’d very thoughtful, and often survey’d me with a sort of concern in her look :—or I, perhaps, foolishly imagin’d she did so. Now,

Now, Lucy—if in reality this good woman has seen Mr. Benson (who told me he had never been here) so frequently, as she says, at Bath, in every season,—what am I to think?—Distraction is indeed in that thought.—You will say why did I not interrogate Mrs. Powel on the subject, and ask if she knew any thing amiss in his character:—No, my dear—by no means would I suffer it to be imagin'd that I had *doubts* of the character of the man to whom I am in a few days to be united for ever.—I really have *no doubts*.—She certainly must make a *mistake* in the person.—In the evening however (for it still hung on my mind) I mention'd what Mrs. Powel had said.—He laugh'd, and taking my hand, “my angel,” he cried, “you will have enough to do, if you listen to the reports of these kind of people.”

A long and tender conversation ensued:

su'd:—the result of which was, that on Thursday next, I shall, my dear, enter into that state, which will render your Fanny the happiest, or the most miserable of women:—for I am one of those who think there can be no *medium* in *such* an union.

We propose that the ceremony shall be perform'd here; a few days after which *awful* solemnity we intend returning to London. Awful indeed! astonishing is it to me, to consider the unthinking levity with which most young people run into this irrevocable state!—I am, I confess, timidity itself, on the approaching occasion; and fear I shall behave exceeding foolish.—But indeed, seriously, my Lucy, I have a weight at my heart, which I can neither account for, or express; but lest its sadness should flow to my pen, I will put a stop to this short epistle.

Adieu then, ever your sincere

FANNY.

L E T T E R XXIX.

Bath, May 8.

LUCY, my fate is fix'd : I am this moment return'd from the abbey church, where I have just pronounced that important *yes*, which will determine my happiness or misery.—I am not superstitious, but in the moment of my approaching the sacred altar, I was seiz'd with such an universal tremor throughout my frame, that it was with the utmost difficulty I could preserve myself from fainting. I may indeed say with Eloisa,

“ Priest, shrines, and altars, *swam* before my sight.”

Mr. Benson appear'd all transport !—
I—all, as poor Sigismunda exclaims,

“ Nought but tumult, fears, and weakness.”

You

You may imagine this little wedding was conducted with the utmost privacy: I went and was brought back in a chair. I made very little preparations as to a bridal-dress, a plain white lustring, and a neat chip hat, were the—But here comes the servant, with a letter.—Heaven's from whom?—It is neither the handwriting of my dearest Lucy, nor of Mr. Barlow,—and yet methinks I have somewhere seen the writing before.—These were my thoughts while my trembling fingers seemed almost incapable of breaking the seal.—But, good God! what were my thoughts on seeing the name of Sir Charles Belford subscribed!

O Lucy, read the contents of the above letter, and then say, the measure of my woes is surely full!

SIR CHARLES BELFORD, to Miss
BELTON.

Circus, Bath, May 8.

Madam,

AT length death having releas'd me from a marriage which my *honour* alone prompted me to fulfil, I have the extatic happiness of offering my heart and hand to my charming Miss Belton,—which I now beg she will accept;—and also my life, my fortune—which I lay at her feet.—I flatter myself, my adorable maid, you will believe *that* passion sincere which commenced from the first moment I beheld you, and which nothing *then* but the unfortunate *ties* by which I was bound by a dying father, should have prevented me from declaring.

Since the decease of my wife (now near a twelve month) I have been most assiduously employ'd in searching almost the whole kingdom over

for my inexpressibly dear Miss Belton.—My servant, who was with me at Grimston House, last night accidentally saw you, and flew to acquaint me where you lodg'd.—Transported with the happiness of this intelligence, I beg your permission to wait on you this evening, to convince you of the honour, and the tenderest affection of him, whose heart and hand are offer'd with every sentiment of the most faithful passion.

I am, Madam,
your sincere, and ever devoted,

CHARLES BELFORD.

P. S. Be so kind as to inform me by the bearer of this, at what hour I may this evening throw myself at your feet.—Adieu! my angel, till that happy moment.

Judge, my friend, what was the situation of my mind,—what were the feelings of my heart, at the reading
the

the above letter!—It was with difficulty I got through the contents,—I found a mist before my eyes,—my heart beating through my bosom;—and it was with the greatest hardship I preserv'd myself from sinking, lifeless, on the floor.

“ My God !” I exclaim'd, “ had it been thy gracious will to have suffer'd thy servant to have known—But wretch that I am, would I dare to expostulate with Heaven?—Have I not within this fatal hour given my hand to my *husband* ?”

In the utmost distraction of mind, I snatch'd a pen, and wrote the following answer.

To Sir Charles Belford.

Sir,

The generous contents of your letter demand my utmost gratitude.—The honour, the happiness you would confer on an unhappy woman, are

not in her power to accept, since she is but this hour return'd from the altar, where she has plighted her faith and hand in the indissoluble *bands* of marriage to another.—In my *present* situation, honour and delicacy forbid me to say all I *could* on this occasion:—but thus much I will acknowledge, that had your noble sentiments,—your generous offer, been receiv'd only a few days since, the world, united, should not have prevented me from accepting your ever-honour'd hand.—Providence has decreed otherwise:—Sir Charles Belford's generous heart will dictate to him, that we must meet no more.—May you, Sir, be happy in another choice, and may you banish from your remembrance *her* who, to the last moment of her life, must acknowledge she is your most gratefully obliged,
and obedient servant,

FRANCES BENSON.

The

The above letter I have dispatch'd this moment by Sir Charles's servant, who waited for an answer.—In a few minutes he will know that I am the *wife* of another ! What a peculiar fate is mine, to be *oblig'd* to renounce the hand of Sir Charles Belford ! my mind is in a perfect chaos.—Honour, gratitude, love, reason, seem to harrow up my soul.—But what have I to do with reflections ?—Too—too—late *now* for reflections !

A burst of tears have at last found their way.—Lucy, I will hasten our departure from Bath immediately :—that is, to-morrow.—I would not for a thousand worlds be in the same place where there may be a possibility of meeting with —— But here comes my—ah, Lucy !—my *husband*.—You may believe I have totally destroy'd Sir Charles's letter.

* * * * *

Afternoon, Four o'Clock.

As this is my *wedding* day, I have ask'd the good Mrs. Powel to dine with us.—Mr. Benson had likewise a friend of his,—whom I cannot say I liked much—he appears to be rather, I think, of the *libertine* order;—but I may be mistaken.

We are going this afternoon, in a small party, to drink tea at a sweet situation, near this city, call'd Lincomb Spa.—Any where to divert my present distracting ideas.—When I went down to dinner, Mr. Benson whisper'd me softly, “ he was sure I had been weeping.”

My Lucy, methinks, pities my wayward fate;—but do not my dear:—Depend on my exerting every faculty of my soul, to drive thence the idea of—But not another word about him.—I am the *wife* of a worthy man, and to the utmost of my power
will

will endeavour to deserve the appellation of a *good* one.

To-morrow morning, by my desire, Mr. Benson has fix'd for our departure from Bath: my next, therefore, will be from London.

Adieu, my dear friend, our little party waits for our setting out on our short excursion.

Ever, ever your's,

F. B.

L E T T E R X X X .

London, May 22.

NOW, indeed, may you, my dear friend, bestow a tear of tender sympathy for the inevitable misfortunes which are breaking on the devoted head of your poor, lost, undone Fanny!

Lucy, in one word, I am married to — But the following conversation which pass'd between this hus-

K 4

band

band and myself, yesterday, will best explain my fate.

We were sitting after breakfast.—Mr. Benfon had just been reading over a poem of mine entitled, “The female Philosopher,” with which he appear’d highly delighted, and was making many fine speeches on the occasion,—after which, he appear’d lost in thought for some moments:—then suddenly snatching my hand, and looking upon me with fondness, —“I fancy (said he) I could put that *philosophy* of your’s, my charming Fanny, to its highest test.—Do you imagine, you are really *proof* against *every* adverse stroke of fortune which this beautiful ode of your’s so pathetically enumerates?—Do you imagine fate has exhausted every *arrow* in her quiver?”

“I *imagine*, (answered I smiling, and in the same tone as himself) that I have experienced the greatest mis-
fortunes

fortunes (guilt excepted) this world can inflict."

He shook his head—"Ah! my sweet girl—you know nothing—nothing of real calamity.—I could a tale unfold"—I stared.—"Nay,"—continued he after a pause, and striking his forehead with his fist—"Confusion!—it must be reveal'd,—it must be discover'd,—and the sooner the better."

I now, my dear, was really alarm'd.

"For Heaven's sake, my dear Mr. Benson, (said I, taking his hand) what mighty mystery is it you have to reveal? One would imagine by the *preface*, (forcing a half-smile) that you had something very terrible indeed to discover. Come—let me hear—I am quite prepar'd."

"Well, my charming philosopher then,"—said he—"what will you say, when I tell you that you have

K 5

married

married a gentleman indeed, but—one who is an absolute beggar?”

I started—I took out my salts—I was visibly shock’d:—yet I recover’d myself enough to say,—“If that is the case, we must endeavour by our industry, to gain some honest support.—I really do not look on poverty as the greatest of calamities.”

My husband, Lucy, seem’d amaz’d at my calmness.—“Thou heavenly angel!” said he, clasping me to his bosom,—“teach me how to thank thee!”

“But (said I, innocently)—what has your uncle then disinherited you?—or what can possibly have happen’d to occasion such an astonishing change in your affairs?—Your stipend from your uncle was very genteel,—and that, with your place in the Excise-office, would have enabled us to live very comfortably.”—I was proceeding, when he started from his chair, and

flung himself at my feet.—But guess, my friend, my astonishment—my horror, I may say, to hear him declare—“ O my Fanny!—my angel! forgive me! — Alas! — rigid necessity compell’d me to deceive you with a forged tale.—I have no uncle in Essex, or elsewhere—I have no place in public office.”—

Imagine, my dear friend, what I must in that moment endure, when told I was married to a man *capable* of such a horrible deception!—*That—that*—wounded my heart more deeply than the certain knowledge I had given my hand to a beggar.

“ Good God, (said I) no uncle! O why—why did you not openly—generously—inform me of this before?—Before it was too late to—”

“ Because (interrupted he) I lov’d—I ador’d you to distraction.—I knew an *avowal* of my circumstances, must have prevented our union:—and I

trust, now, the generous heart of my sweet girl—”

I stopped him short here—for I could not bear to hear him make use of the odious, *stale* pretext, that his *passion* for me was the cause of his deceit.

“ Forbear, Mr. Benson, that *excuse*, I beseech you.—Be assur’d, I could much better support the most trying scenes of poverty, than this shocking scene of *deceit* you have practis’d on an innocent, helpless girl.”—I burst into tears.—He was still on his knees, and endeavour’d by the most soothing behaviour to calm me.

“ If you will hear me, (said he) I will tell you all.”

“ For mercy’s sake,” I sobb’d out, “ what is this dreadful *all* ?”

I was terrified to death, lest the man to whom I was united for life, should prove to be a highwayman, or some other infamous character.

He

He then inform'd me he was by birth a foreigner,—(ah, Mrs. Powel, thought I, you was right)—and natural son to the Marquis De-Lacour, at Paris,—whose name he *sometimes* went by:—that he had had a most liberal education, and had led the life of a man of fashion for some years:—that from a disagreement with his father, he had left him entirely, and came over to England:—that for the four last years he had frequented the seasons at Bath, and Tunbridge;—and frankly own'd, that the gaming-tables were his only resource: he acknowledg'd his errors had been many, but none of a very capital nature;—but that he had unfortunately contracted such a load of debts—upwards of three thousand pounds—which must be paid, or a *pistol* end his difficulties at once.

O my friend, imagine what I suffer'd during this horrid recital!

He

He now began in the most pathetic terms to implore my forgiveness, of what *he* call'd, a *little innocent love stratagem*: he lamented his past faults, —declar'd his abhorrence of them, and solemnly vow'd a total amendment.—In short, there was not an art he left unessay'd, in order to move my tenderness, compassion, and humanity. He knelt, wept, swore, intreated, and threaten'd his own life, if I would not instantly forgive him.

For my own part, I wonder I did not die on the spot. What infinite *art* must this man, my Lucy, be possess'd of! I think I have before told you, he is endu'd with every grace of eloquence. During the above long confession of his, I had just reflection enough to consider that, as I was the *wife* of this bad man, I must e'en make the best of it.—“ Well—well,” said I,—at the end of his confession, and repeated supplications for forgiveness,

ness, —“ ’tis past, and cannot be recall’d.”—What could I do, Lucy? what *ought* I to have done as a *wife*? —In short,—I *forgave him*. I shall not pretend to describe his acknowledgements—his transports, &c.

“ But these three thousand pounds —said he—must be instantly paid.—Two thousand on Monday next I am bound to pay in a bond,—or else a prison must be my portion.—On Monday I am to meet my creditors.—Distraction!—what am I to do?”

“ Why (said I, endeavouring at some degree of fortitude) I have near fifteen hundred pounds in my banker’s hands.”—“ And (interrupted he with quickness) your annuity would sell for another thousand.”

I felt myself shock’d, Lucy, at his so *readily* thinking of such an expedient: my absolute ruin star’d me in the face.—But not to dwell on this miserable affair, suffice it to say, I
have

have given up the whole of my little fortune;—and last night, my husband sold my annuity for a thousand pounds.—But poverty, alas! which now seems coming fast upon me, is not the worst part of the story, I fear. I fear this man is a wretched *libertine*.——*Fear*, did I say?—His French education,—a certain levity, with which I *now* observe, he treats the most serious subjects,—the shocking life of a gamester,—all—all declare what a miserable hand I have made of this marriage.—A wife but a fortnight this day!—You see, my Lucy, *matrimony* was his very last *resort*.—O heavens! that your poor innocent Fanny, bred in the very bosom of piety, simplicity, and under the sacred eye of her *angel-father*,—should at last be the wretched dupe of that most contemptible of all characters,—a *man of pleasure*!—a man of *the world*! a rake!—a libertine! I now clearly
see

see the abyfs into which my too great credulity has precipitated me.—O may this too—too hasty ſtep of mine be a warning to the young and unprotected of my ſex, how they run, as I did, headlong into this awful ſtate! —And yet I *fancied*, forſooth, I married for the ſake of a *protector*,—a friend!—A protector indeed!

Lucy, if I dwell longer on this ſubject I ſhall run diſtracted.—Adieu.

Your's ever,

F. B.

LETTER XXXI.

London, June 26.

FOR this laſt month, my Lucy, my every moment has been engag'd. We have been removing into another lodging;—my huſband having told me he had ſome *very particular* reaſons why he choſe to remove
out

out of the quarter we were in before. We are now in the Hay-market, very near the Opera House, an amusement of which he is doatingly fond.

Notwithstanding my little fortune is all paid away, Mr. Benson (for by *that* name I shall call him, as he tells me he was baptized after his mother's name of Benson, who it seems was an Englishwoman)—Mr. Benson then, I say, still owes, I find, several hundred pounds. How these debts are to be paid I know not.—Thoughtless, gay, and inconsiderate, my husband is too much the man of fashion to regard any thing but the present moment.—I have been intreating him very earnestly to get into some industrious way of livelihood, but I fear to little purpose.—As to myself, I am determin'd to write night and day for our mutual support.

“ Indeed, my dear,” said I, “ I will do every thing on my part for
this

this purpose, as I know I am incapable of sustaining the wretched idea of your accumulating debts on debts.—In the first place, let us try to reduce our expences into as narrow a circle as possible; in the next, think of something that may procure us a future subsistence.

I have at last got this husband of mine, to engage in works of translation for the booksellers.—I think I have told you before, that his learning, his genius, in almost every branch of literature, is uncommonly good:—but I observe, with sorrow, he has no *application*. He is extremely capable of the task he has undertaken;—but, alas! his habit of idleness is so great, and rooted, that I perceive already he will drive me crazy in this matter. Whilst he is in the midst of translating one of the finest passages in his author, he starts up, runs to his violin (for he is an admirable musician)

fician) plays a capriccio, or an extravaganza, with the greatest taste,—and then declares he can no longer fit down to old musty authors, and dry translations:—so that you see, Lucy, this business is likely to go on swimmingly.—No longer ago than last night, we were both sitting at our pens, when he started up, saying he must just run to the opera, to hear a divine air, that was to be sung in the last act.—He went—and did not return till three in the morning.

I do not look on Mr. Benfon as an ill-natur'd man; I do not imagine he will ever be the *surly* husband;—but he is what the French call *inconsequent*. Nothing is to be relied upon in the whole tenor of his conduct; he seems determin'd by nothing but the impulse of the present moment; nor has he, that I can observe, one fixed principle; he has adopted a few
absurd

absurd prejudices, which flatter his passions.—I am interrupted.

* * * * *

Tuesday.

I cannot help giving the friend of my heart the detail of an incident which has disturb'd me beyond expression;—and which will, I think, very sufficiently develop Mr. Benson's character.

He came to me, yesterday, in a great hurry, to say, that he had reason to imagine he should be instantly arrested by his taylor, for the sum of ninety pounds.

Good God (said he in much agitation) what can I do? to be torn from you, and carried to a prison, I cannot—cannot—submit to—and yet—it is the only dreadful alternative."

"Heaven's (said I) you terrify me.—The Miscellanies I am now writing, will be finished next week, the money

ney arising from them, will perhaps help to"—He interrupted me.

"My sweet girl, what will so small a sum do?—Let me see—have you nothing that would turn into ready cash?—The rascally taylor, but three days ago, gave me his word not to molest me for these six months.—Stay—I have a thought.—I think, my dearest life, you have a diamond ring;—you have also a miniature picture, you once shew'd me, which I observ'd was set in diamonds.—Now, my angel, if you could consent to part with those I should be in a condition to discharge the debt, otherwise a prison must this night be my portion."

I ran up stairs immediately, and gave him the miniature picture of my dear Mrs. Barlow, —and also the ring.

"These diamonds, Mr. Benson, (said I) do what you please with;—
only

only I beg the picture itself may be preserv'd."—He clasp'd me to his bosom.

"I fear," said he, "my sweet love, I shall not be able to return tonight; for this fellow has appointed me to meet him at Barnet;—the rascal has a country house there.—My Friend, Mr. Brookes, whom you have seen, is to go with me, and by that time the affair is settled it will be impossible for me to get away at a proper hour."

I took a kind leave of him, and begg'd him on no account to run the danger of coming over Finchley Common after sun-set.—He took an affectionate leave, and departed.

Soon after, a particular friend of mine before my marriage, an amiable good girl, call'd to see me; or rather, as she said, to see my husband, whom it has so happen'd, she had never yet seen.

"My dear Miss Edwards," said I,
"your

“ your curiosity cannot now be gratified,—for he is just gone out, and will not return all the day, nor indeed I believe till to-morrow:—as he is oblig’d to spend the night at Barnett.”

“ Well (said she laughing) I do indeed long to see this man you have married;—but now I never shall, as I am going down in a few days to Norwich, to reside with my friends:—but,” said this agreeable chearful friend, “ as you tell me you shall be alone this evening, and as indeed, my dear Fanny, you seem melancholy, I have a little scheme in my head.—Were you ever at the opera?—if not, I absolutely insist on it you shall give me leave to treat you with a very fine one to night:—all the world will be there.—We will wrap ourselves up in our hoods and cloaks, and go into the gallery.—What say you?—Nay, I will not be denied.”

“ It

“ It is impossible (said I) my dear to deny you any thing.—I should like it of all things, if my husband was at home to escort us.”

“ We shall need no husband (said she) or any other male creature for the purpose—it is only a step from your door to the Opera House,—I’ll dine with you,—and we will muffle up our heads, that no one shall see a bit of our pretty faces—and we will go early.”

You may be certain, my Lucy, though I really had a great desire to hear an opera, that if my friend, who is a lady of fortune, had not insisted on treating me, I should on no account have gone to so expensive a diversion: a little amusement too was what my spirits were in great need of, as you must be convinced, from the subject of my husband’s conversation in the morning, my heart was greatly depress’d.—But to proceed.

To the Opera House we went, and the gallery was filling apace: however, with much squeezing and difficulty, we got down to the third row.—Directly before us sat an excessive pretty woman; by her dress she appear'd a foreigner: I observ'd the eyes of the gentlemen round us, were upon her, and one who sat next to me whisper'd his friend, but loud enough for me to hear,—“ I am sorry we shall not hear that angel Signora Seratini to night; she is certainly the prettiest opera girl we ever had:—that is *her*, just before us.”

By the side of this lady sat a gentleman in green and gold;—but as he sat, I could not then see his face: Miss Edwards, however, could; she whisper'd me, “ Fanny, I have lost my heart already; the man before you is, without exception, the finest figure, and has the finest face I ever beheld.—It is well for you, child, you are married.”

I sigh'd,

I sigh'd, and could have told my lively friend it was not quite so well.—I observ'd an arm of the gentleman in green and gold before us, was put round the waist of the pretty opera girl,—whilst his other hand had one of her's, which he alternately press'd to his lips and bosom.—I whisper'd Miss Edwards,—“ We have a most tender lover, Harriet, before us;—heigh ho! I wish Mr. Benson were here, he is so extremely fond of music.”

Some little noise in the gallery, just afterwards, occasion'd the gentleman in green and gold, whose hair, I forgot to say, was dress'd in the very highest French taste, to turn his head; but, good Heaven! what was my amazement, my astonishment,—to see he was my perfidious husband!—Happily I did not faint.—I took out my salts, and told my friend I was much disordered from the extreme

heat of the place.—Here I must take the merit on myself to say, apparently base as Mr. Benson was, I had the presence of mind not to disclose to Miss Edwards, that he was my husband.

Imagine, my dear friend, what an evening I spent! Such was the distraction of my mind, that neither the sweetness of the music, or the grandeur of the whole scene of elegant machinery before me, was not capable of giving me one moment's relief.

My fair companion had, as I think I have before told you, never seen my husband.—She now saw his face for the first time, and whisper'd me, —“ Never was so sweet a countenance!—what eyes!—Look, Fanny, look!—what features!—what an elegant figure! Some nobleman I'll lay my life.”

I leave

I leave you, Lucy, to judge my feelings.

The faithless Benson and his lewd mistress, were too full of their dying looks and ardent glances to each other, during the most pathetic music in the world, to take any notice of the rest of the company.—But had it been otherwise, it was impossible he should discover me, as my whole face, (eyes and nose excepted) was entirely covered with my hood.—But to go on with my story.

The opera being now finish'd, we began, as the croud lessened, to make the best of our way home. I darted a look at my wicked husband, as I left the gallery, and saw him most assiduously putting on the cloak, &c. of his opera girl, to preserve her from catching cold.

My companion and I arriv'd in a few minutes in safety to my lodgings: and though I fear, Lucy, you

will think this scheme of going to the opera, not the *wisest* in the world, yet, I assure you, we had been the whole evening, as free from either insult, or impertinence of any kind, as if we had sat the whole evening in my dining-room.—It is true, we had once or twice sweet-meats offer'd by the gentlemen near us; but the extreme reserve with which we refus'd their politeness, gave them at once to know we were women of reputation.—Men ever did, and ever will revere a strict, virtuous behaviour in women.—Miss Edwards justly remark'd, that half the scrapes which women fall into at these public places, are owing to their own levity, and indulging what is call'd, a few fashionable freedoms.

My agreeable companion sat with me till near twelve o'clock.—With what difficulty did I restrain myself from bursting into tears, and informing

ing her of the whole of my sad—sad fate!

“ I heartily wish,” said she, “ this husband of your’s was got safe home from Barnet.—I don’t like that Finchley Common.—But I will not, my Fanny, alarm your fears.”

“ Ah (thought I) my mistaken friend, a highwayman would perhaps be a less formidable enemy, than that dangerous Syren with which he is at this moment engag’d !”

At length we parted.—I wrung her hand.—“ Harriet,” said I, “ something whispers to my soul, we shall never meet again.”—She wept—and flung herself into a chair which waited for her.

I retir’d directly to my apartment, and there threw myself on my bed, in an agony of grief.—The idea of being the wife of a most abandon’d, of an *avow’d* libertine, harrow’d up my soul. The shocking deceit,—

the horrid lye he had been guilty of the preceding day, in order to strip me of my little treasure, (and that treasure too the gift of a dear—departed friend)—to strip me of that sacred deposit, also, which I had so long, and so carefully preserv'd, and all for the lewd purpose of lavishing them on the most extravagant class of prostitutes, a contemptible opera girl!—Distraction is in the thought.

Ah, my dear—how wretched—how deplorably wretched is a virtuous woman, endu'd with delicacy and sensibility, who is united for life to a *libertine*!

After passing a miserable night, in which I had never pull'd off my cloaths, I arose early;—when, after having on my knees most earnestly implor'd the assistance of almighty God, to endue me with fortitude in this most trying circumstance, I endeavour'd to swallow a dish of tea,
which

which having done, I sat down to the employment of my pen—for I am now, my dear Lucy, earning my daily bread.

About four in the afternoon, my libertine husband came home.—He saluted me—oh! these men, Lucy!—with much pretended tendernefs.—I fix'd my eyes steadfastly in his face, and with a firm, calm tone of voice ask'd him, if the diamonds were sufficient to discharge his debt at Barnet?

“ Why no—my sweet girl, I could only get fifty pounds for them.—I spent a cursed dull evening last night—shut up with two or three creditors at Barnet, haggling about payment.—That rascal, my taylor, kept me up till near one o'clock this morning.—At last we have compromis'd the matter. I have given him my note of hand, payable six months hence, for the remaining thirty guineas.”

L 5

Whilst

Whilst he was running on with this wicked tale of falsehood, I sigh'd for the depravity of human nature, to think how this man was multiplying his crimes, by endeavouring to hide them by the flimsy gloss of an impious lye.

“ I suppose (said I, with as much indifference and archness in my look as I could assume, whilst my poor heart was bleeding at his treachery) —I suppose your fine suit of green and gold makes no small part of your taylor's bill.”

“ Green and gold, my Fanny! —What mean you?” —affecting to be surpriz'd.

“ I mean, Mr. Benson, the suit you wore last night at the opera. —Indeed, I must confess, I never saw so smart a figure. —Your little opera girl was dress'd with much taste likewise. —What is her name?”

“ Hea-

“Heavens! (said the unblushing wretch, with great effrontery) what mean you?”

“Come—come—(replied I) descend no more to these pitiful falsehoods:—I know, alas! your whole adventure of last night.”

I then narrated to him Miss Edwards’s calling on me, and taking me to the opera, &c. and of my having sat the whole evening just behind him and his favorite lady. — Then, bursting into tears, I exclaim’d,—“Why—why am I thus treated? — Why should you deceive me in this shocking manner?”

Ah! my dear, this man is *harden’d* indeed in wickedness.—He began most solemnly swearing, and assuring me (though I had the sure evidence of my own eyes for the truth of the fact) that I must certainly have been deceiv’d in mistaking him for some other man: he even affected to *laugh*

at my *egregious mistake*, as he had the matchless assurance to call it. He then took his violin, play'd half a sonata, humm'd an Italian air, and then left me to go to the tavern.—Such is the state your poor Fanny is doom'd to for *life!*

* * * * *

July 18.

Alas! my friend, this unhappy man, my husband, for this last week, has been very ill of a fever!—seated by his bed-side, and giving him every medicine with my own hands,—think of my agony to hear him, in his delirium, raving continually on his favorite mistress Seratini, or, when fancying she is with him, talking to her in the softest manner that love can dictate!—In the beginning of his illness, he desir'd an old physician of his particular acquaintance to be sent for.

The following short conversation with the above gentleman (relative to
my

my husband) will shew you in what light Mr. Benson is look'd upon as to character in the world.

When this physician made his first visit, I attended him, after he had seen his patient, into the dining-room, to give him paper and pens, to write his *recipé*.—He appear'd a grave, good-looking old man.—I thought he beheld me with visible concern—but you will imagine my surprize, when he said to me,—“ Pray, child, how long have you *been* with this gentleman ?”

I thought this an *odd* question to a *wife*, and said in a tone of surprize, “ Sir !”

“ I ask (said he) how long you have *liv'd* with my patient ;—how long—that is—how long he has taken you under his protection ?”

I sat myself down with some dignity. — “ Liv'd with ! — Protection, Sir ! I am the *wife* of Mr. Benson,
and

and if you mean otherwise, you are totally mistaken."

"My poor child (said the old man)—that *epithet* is often made use of on these occasions,—but with me it is unnecessary."

"Good Sir (said I) what can you mean? I was lawfully married in the abbey church at Bath;—the certificate of which I have, at this moment, in my pocket."

"I beg your pardon, Madam (said he, greatly surpriz'd)—Well—I wish you happiness.—You have married a gentleman by birth, and of a most liberal education.—He has great good-nature—he is guilty of no one *vice*—a few *little foibles* only; such as a too great fondness for dice,—the ladies,—and such like: these are his *little foibles*, but he is a man of no vice—no vice indeed."

"My God, (thought I) what an age is this! when the most outrageous
vices

vices are only call'd by the soft appellation of *little foibles*! I fancy soon, my friend, *murder* alone will be the only thing call'd a *crime*. I found afterwards this old physician was a native of France, where, I am inform'd, those *little foibles*, as he call'd them, are the indispenfable characteristics of a *man of fashion*.

* * * * *

Friday.

Mr. Benson is at length on the recovery, — but by slow degrees. — A letter was this day brought, apparently written in a woman's hand. — What a task! for a *wife* to give her husband a letter from his *mistress* — for such I doubt not it was — but that task I perform'd. — This illness has reduced us to our last guinea! what writings I had finish'd, I have dispos'd of to a bookseller, for a sum too trifling to mention, and I am just going

to make up a large bundle of my best wearing apparel, to sell.

Ah! my Lucy, the time is arriv'd indeed, that your Fanny is become poor and destitute!—"Oh! the fell stings of late, of vain repentance!"

Adieu! pity and pray for
your unhappy friend,

F. B.

✍ An interval now pass'd of near two years, in which, though our unfortunate heroine still continu'd, as usual, to correspond with her friend at Madras, yet the letters at this period are omitted.—They chiefly contain an account of the difficulties she labour'd under, in earning a precarious subsistence by her pen—now her only support—and of the miseries she daily experienced, in being united to a man of the most libertine principles, and abandon'd conduct. During this interval, however, it may be necessary to observe, that she was now become

a mo-

a mother to a sweet girl, whom she calls *Lucy*, after the name of her beloved friend. The letters that follow, the editor presents to the public, presuming they exhibit an artless and affecting picture of distress, of a virtuous woman struggling with poverty;—her heart pierced with every species of anguish, (*guilt* excepted) and yet under these circumstances, performing the most exalted duties of the conjugal state to an ungrateful and worthless husband. May *her* behaviour, on that *trying* occasion, be an example to the *many* (I fear) wretched women, struggling under the like circumstances!—

L E T T E R XXXII.

London, March 2.

THE assurance, my beloved friend, which you give me in your last letters, that you shall certainly re-visit England, is (however distant

distant the prospect) like a cordial to my languid heart.—Shall I once more embrace you? Shall I once more strain you to my faithful bosom? Gracious heaven enable me to bear with *fortitude* the present ills, in expectation of that blessed moment! With what delight shall I present to you my darling, my little Lucy!—sweet babe!—her *smiles* are my chief, and only comfort, except your letters.—She is now sleeping in my lap, whilst I am writing.

You beg me, my dear, to be very *minute*, and you give your reason for it.—You justly remark that, “as it is only from the almost imperceptible touches of the pencil in the picture that a likeness is obtained, so from a minute description of the most familiar occurrences of life, with the secret workings of the sensations of the human heart, on every trying occasion, we are best informed of the
senti-

sentiments and real character of the writer.

My health, which you so tenderly enquire after, I am sorry to say is greatly impair'd from my too close application to my pen.—I have (alas! I have no other support) *written* myself almost blind,—and am, whenever my little Lucy (for I am her only nurse) is sleeping, deeply engag'd in a translation, for which I have made a small agreement with my bookseller.—I have contracted a pain in my chest and stomach from the constant posture of writing, which I fear will in the end be of bad consequence.—But be that as it will, my pen is my only resource, to prevent my poor babe and myself, from absolutely perishing.—*We*, that is my little smiling girl and myself (for as to Mr. Benson, I frequently do not see him for some weeks) are at present *subsisting* on an *apparition* I wrote for an evening paper

per last week.—“Slender diet,” you will say. A few days before we liv’d pretty comfortably on a horrid murder, which the printer of the same paper engag’d me to pen for him.—In short, with us poor devils of authors, a *well-timed* assassination, or a bloody battle, is a never-failing resource. But, *seriously*, my dear,—for indeed my heart is too heavy to continue the above jocular style,—the life of a galley-slave is to be preferr’d to that of one who writes for *bread*. Sometimes a dozen sheets of a difficult translation are return’d on my hands, the work of many a sleepless hour;—or a task insist’d on to be accomplish’d in so short a period of time, that it is absolutely impossible to be undertaken at all.

Ah! my friend, to what am I reduced!—When I look back—Gracious heaven!—I once—too vainly flatter’d myself with being forsooth an *example*
to

to my sex.—An *example*, indeed!—Ah! may my unhappy story be a *warning* rather to the indigent of my sex, how they indulge a passion for *scribbling* (unless powerfully supported) and how they venture too precipitately into the married state, without the strictest enquiry into the *morals* and *character* of their intended husband.—What can I, what *ought* I to say of the man to whom I voluntarily devoted myself for life?—You kindly bid me pour my sorrows into your faithful breast:—here then they are: take them, and ease me of part of their burden.

Mr. Benson often leaves me for months, either under pretence of visiting some friend in the country,—or what is most probable, to fly to the gaming tables (his old resource) at Bath, or some other public place.—He now is gone, as he himself inform'd me, to Newmarket, with
some

some gentlemen of the *turf*.—A set of sharpers, I doubt not.—As he has now been gone on this hopeful expedition, whatever it is, above a month, I fear he is involved in some dreadful scrape, or fresh difficulties.—O Lucy! what agonies must a heart, naturally timid, and delicate as mine, suffer in being united to such a dissipated —— but let me stop my pen,—he is my *husband*.

How often do I waste the midnight hour in sighs for this unhappy, thoughtless man!—How often do I breathe the most ardent prayers to Heaven, to pardon, and to touch his heart:—How often, when I am surveying that air of candour, manly dignity, and sweetness, which is diffus'd so strongly over the *seeming* honest countenance of my unhappy husband,—how often, I repeat, am I ready to exclaim aloud, gracious Heaven! is it possible,—that the meanest
deceit,

deceit, the grossest falsehood, the most specious vices, should lurk under the appearance of so much virtue?—I am ready to cry out with my favourite Shakespear,

—“ That ever man should *smile*, and *smile*,
“ Yet be a *villain* !”

How absurd, my dear friend, how absolutely false is that ridiculous maxim, (though to Heaven I wish I may find it otherwise) “ That a reclaim’d libertine makes the *best* husband !”—Alas ! I fear there never, in serious *truth*, was a *thorough* libertine *reclaim’d*.—A sensual course of life, in which vice is made, as it were, its second nature, *corrupts* the very soul ; —it poisons every avenue that can even lead to remorse.—Milton exactly speaks my present thought on this subject, in the following most *just*, and beautiful lines :

—“ But when vice, by impure thoughts
and words,

“ But

“ But most by lewd, and lavish act of sin,
 “ Defiles the sacred temple of the mind,
 “ The soul grows clotted with contagion,
 “ *Imbodies*, and *imbrates* itself,
 “ Till the *pure property* is lost
 “ Of th’ *divine* commission.”

I have indeed heard of most wonderful reformati^ons,—but I fear, I greatly fear it is as almost impossible to wash an Ethiopian white, as to—— I am interrupted.

My bookseller who had agreed to give me fifteen pounds, for a work I have but this day finished, (in a translation from the French) has this moment brought me the money.—This is lucky,—this will, for the present at least, support my precious babe, and her wretched mother.—Ah! my friend, where is now the miserable father? Perhaps a prison—perhaps at this moment the wretched inmate of some loathsome receptacle of vice!—“ Gracious Heaven! how willingly would I fly to his relief, and
 with

with this little hard-earn'd pittance, purchase his liberty, if some kind angel would direct my steps to his miserable abode!—Another interruption.

The maid servant of the house is just come up to inform me, that a gentleman desires to speak to me.—Who can it be?—I must abruptly conclude, and my little Lucy too awakes.—She smiles—she holds the pen, whilst I bid it tell my beloved friend,

I am,
with great affection,
her devoted,
F. B.

L E T T E R XXXIII.

March 15.

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VOL. II. M comfort,

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L E T T E R XXXIII.

March 15.

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VOL. II. M comfort,

comfort and assistance have been those heavenly maxims of christian fortitude on the trying occasion, which teach us to return good for evil !

“ Leave moralizing, Fanny, (you cry) if you possibly can for a few minutes, and tell me what is the matter.”

Well then, my dear, I will satisfy you as well as my present half distracted thoughts will give me leave.

At the conclusion of my last letter, I told you a gentleman desir'd to be introduced to me.—It was a Mr. Brooks, an acquaintance of my husband's, who came to tell me he had just heard he was in town.

“ O where (said I)—where is he? —Is he coming home? Is he in health? I have not seen him these many weeks.

Mr. Brooks, on my repeating my question *where* my husband was—he-
sitated—and at length, after expressing
his

his sorrow to be the messenger of ill news, inform'd me Mr. Benson had been in town a week, but had been arrested on the night of his arrival, and had lain ever since in a spunging-house.

“ Gracious Heaven ! ” — said I — “ I will go, — I will fly this moment to his relief. — I have most luckily just receiv'd a little sum, which may help to discharge the debt : — I will go to him this moment — where is he confin'd ? how is his health ? ”

“ Why, Madam — (said Mr. Brooks, who has some humanity) — it grieves me to tell you — but you must know : — in a word then, Mr. Benson is ill — very ill : — a fever seiz'd him the very next day after his accident of this cursed arrest. — But indeed, Madam, you must not go to him — indeed you must not.”

“ Not go to him ! ” said I, “ not all the world shall prevent me. — Can

you imagine, Sir, I can support the thought of knowing my husband is ill,—and under confinement,—in trouble,—a prisoner,—and I not endeavour to comfort,—to alleviate his sorrows?—I will watch by his wretched bed—I will support him in these arms—I will supplicate Heaven for his recovery.—Oh! do not longer keep me in suspense, but tell me where he is.”

Mr. Brooks still vehemently oppos’d my going to him.—I was alarm’d at his earnestness in dissuading me, as I fear’d my husband was worse than had been represented—or he might be dead,—“For mercy’s sake,” said I, “tell me the worst at once.”

“Mr. Benson,” replied he, after much hesitation,—“is attended, Madam:—he has a nurse.—But why should I pain your gentle heart, Mrs. Benson, by a recital of unavailing particulars?”

To

To be brief, my Lucy, I gather'd, by broken hints, from this communicative, thoughtless young man, that my husband had brought up from the country with him, a farmer's daughter, whom he had seduced from her parents.—Ah, my friend, what intelligence to a virtuous wife!—it was with difficulty I preserv'd myself from fainting.—That I had long ceas'd to be the woman he *lov'd*, I well knew; but there was something so shocking in the crime of seducing an innocent young creature,—and that it was my *husband* who had done this, that I stood in need of all my fortitude to support me.—In justice, however, to the humanity of Mr. Brooks, I must say, I *drew* this horrid story from him, as he by no means came to *inform* me of this tale;—but as he found that the world united, would not have kept me from Mr. Benson, (so high is my opinion of the *duties*

of marriage) he thought it best to apprise me of the matter.

The virtue I was going to practise was *difficult* I grant.—I was going to attend—I was going to rescue from the horrors of a prison, a man whose affections were estrang'd from me—who lov'd another!—But yet this man, base and vile as he is, was the man to whom I had, before my God at the altar, vowed to succour in sickness, and in every calamity.

I started up from my chair, and rang the bell for the servant of the house to call a coach; the distance being too great, as I intended to carry my *little* nursery with me, to walk so far.—Mr. Brooks would still have prevented me from going.—“Do you really think,” said he, “you can support such a scene?”

“Heaven, I doubt not,” answered I, “will support me with the consideration I am doing my duty.—I
am

am not going (continu'd I, bursting into tears) to upbraid this unhappy man—I am going to assist—to save him."

"You amaze me, Madam," said my visiter; "you are surely a most wonderful woman!"

"I claim no merit, Sir, in doing barely my duty to my husband—but the sooner I fly to him the better."

Mr. Brooks then took his leave. I instantly look'd over all the cash I was mistress of, which amounted to about eighteen pounds. I also took a Dresden apron, and some other fashionable ornaments, the remains of better days, and what I had hitherto carefully preserv'd against an evil hour.—These I propos'd to sell in my way, for the benefit of my husband.—I pack'd up a little basket of some nourishing provision for him, as a chicken—a little wine, chocolate, &c. then imploring the assist-

ance of Heaven to support my spirits,—I took my little Lucy in my arms, who was in a sweet and profound sleep, and wrapping her carefully in a mantle, got into a coach with all my luggage.—I dispos'd in my way of what I intended to sell, by which I increas'd my stock to twenty-two guineas. — With this wealth, I arriv'd at the house in which Mr. Brooks had inform'd me I should find my wretched husband. — An ill-looking man stood at the door. — I alighted — and desir'd he would shew me Mr. Benson's room — and told him that I was his wife. The man look'd at me with a kind of sneer, and usher'd me up a wretched stair-case, and from thence into a miserable little room, the door of which the man open'd, and instantly announced, “ Here's your *wife* come to visit you.”

The

The first object that presented itself to me, was a very pretty young woman, about seventeen, with one arm round my husband's neck;—the other he was pressing to his lips with the fondest delight. He appear'd as just risen from the bed, on which they were both sitting, or rather reclining, in a very tender attitude.—This sight, in defiance of all my boasted fortitude, was too much.—I sunk, almost lifeless, into an old broken chair;—but yet my senses and faculties did not so far forsake me, but that I soon had resolution and strength sufficient to rise from my seat, with my babe in my arms, and advance to my base husband.

I should have mentioned before, that, on hearing his *wife* was come to visit him, he started as if he had heard a thunder-clap.

“How do you do, Mr. Benson,”
—said I,—“I have brought your

M 5 little

little Lucy to see you—and I flew myself to your assistance, the moment I heard of your confinement.—Come, I have good news to tell you: I have brought you a small purse, which I hope will procure your liberty out of this wretched hole.—I am inform'd by Mr. Brooks, the sum is not great, which has occasion'd this fresh calamity.

My husband exclaim'd, “O my Fanny!—thou excellent woman!—I am unworthy of your kindness!”

I held down the child to him, which he kiss'd, and took in his arms.—In our embarrass'd situation, the child, I thought, was no small relief to us.

The young woman, who had started at my entrance, retir'd to the window,—casting on me a mingled look of shame and astonishment. Of *shame*, I repeat, for she was not yet so harden'd in guilt, as to look on me without

without blushing crimson deep.—She survey'd me with wonder, as I imagine she had no idea but that a wife would have enter'd with all the fury of a tygress on such an occasion:—instead of which, I assure you, my friend, I beheld the poor deluded girl with pity.—She saw it—and felt, I doubt not, at that moment,

“How *awful* virtue is,

“And *pined* her loss.”

As to Mr. Benson,—never shall I forget the guilty, despicable figure he made.—He however continu'd playing with the child—and at length inform'd me, that he had been dangerously ill of a fever, but that for the two last days he had been better, as it now was brought to intermit. I then unpack'd my basket; and observing he was faint, mull'd him a cup of wine, which I insisted on his drinking.—“I lay the commands of a wife (said I, smiling, whilst my poor

heart was bursting) on you to eat this biscuit, and a mouthful of this chicken."

After talking to him some time of my intention to discharge his debt,—which he said was no more than twelve guineas,—I told him I had brought some coffee, and when we had partaken of it, I would pay all that was owing there; and I imagin'd, I told him, he might be convey'd in a chair, carefully wrapt up with great safety from catching cold, to our lodgings.—My husband, I thought, for once, seem'd touch'd with remorse for his shameful conduct:—but as the blushing girl still remain'd in the room, we enter'd on no particulars.

When the hour of tea arriv'd—
 "Peggy, (said he, in an aukward manner) I wish you would go and order the tea-things to be brought.

I took the opportunity just then, as she was absent, (for I did not, you
 may

may be convinced, chuse to leave them together) to slip out of the room, and to discharge the debt for which my husband was confined, and also the fees that are usually extorted on these occasions. When I had so done, I return'd again to Mr. Benson.—
“ There (said I) is your release—you are now entirely free to go when you please, which I hope will be as soon as we have had our coffee.”

My husband was just beginning his speeches of acknowledgment for this action, when I interrupted him.

“ Ah !” said I, “ what are all the money-matters in this world, to the anguish I feel in having lost your affection !—Oh Mr. Benson, it is indeed too—too much that you should add the seduction of this poor young creature to the list of your crimes.—Poverty I can support—but these injuries—these vices are too much for humanity to bear !—O my poor babe
(pressing

(pressing her to my bosom, whilst my tears fell on her innocent face)—may you never feel the sorrows that rend the bleeding heart of thy wretched mother.”—I wept aloud.

Mr. Benson either was, or *pretended* to be, mov’d with my behaviour.—He took my hand—he look’d confounded—he hesitated.—At last he stammer’d out—“ I will not deny—I cannot but say—*appearances* are much against me:—but my *heart*—my heart—my dearest Fanny, has never swerv’d from *thee*.”

“ O forbear—forebear—(interrupted I) to imagine I can be *deceiv’d* by so absurd an assertion.”

After more conversation of the like kind, he assur’d me he would never see this young creature more.

“ But (said I) what reparation can you make *her*?—I suppose, as is usual on these occasions, she is *now* to be turn’d into the streets to perish!—

Tell

Tell me—and tell me truly—who are the parents of this poor deluded girl?"

I was proceeding, when she now enter'd the room.—Mr. Benson rose, for he was just able to walk, and call'd her to the window.—He there said a few words to her, which I could not hear.—Soon after we partook of the little refreshment I had brought, of which indeed I stood in need, as I was almost fainting with grief and fatigue, having not tasted a morsel of food that day before, through the flutter in which Mr. Brooks had thrown me by his intelligence.—All matters being now discharg'd relative to the house, I order'd a chair for Mr. Benson. — Whilst I was carefully wrapping him up, that he might not catch cold, I observ'd the young girl standing by in tears.—I was affected, my dear, by her situation:—I forgot my own wrongs, and listen'd to the dictates of my heart, which told me,
the

the poor wretch would, in all probability, be driven to further infamy and perdition in the streets, unless some small provision was made for her present distress.

“ Be in no fear (said I to her, in a mild tone) that you shall remain in this house:—I will take care you shall be conducted to a place of safety, till you can be convey’d to your friends.”—She burst into tears.

“ O Madam, (fobbing out) your goodness is too much for such a wretch as I am.”—My guilty husband cast on me a mingled look of confusion, and I thought, at that moment, of affection.—The chair now carried him off to our lodging.

The moment he was gone, whilst a coach was sent for me and my child, the young woman flung herself at my feet.

“ Forgive me, Madam (said she weeping) you must look on me as a
guilty

guilty creature—such indeed I am, but indeed I did not know Mr. Benson was a married man.—He deceiv'd me in that particular,—and seduced me from my friends, under a pretence of marriage.—I am *ruined*—and I never—never will see his face more. I could tell you all the sad—sad story of my undoing.”

“ I desire (said I, raising her) to hear nothing of so horrid a story.—Where do your parents live?” She readily told me, and that her father was a reputable farmer.

“ Well (said I) here are two guineas—this sum is more than sufficient to carry you to your friends, who, no doubt, are almost distracted at your absence.—I will leave you on my way home, at the inn in safe hands, from whence the stage-coach sets out; and you will arrive at your friends to-morrow evening.

I gave her some very serious advice,

vice, in regard to her future conduct; and the girl, who really appear'd all artless simplicity (ah! my dear, what has not my bad husband to answer for, in corrupting such innocence!) thank'd me with a profusion of blessings and tears.—In fine, I took her in the hackney-coach which now waited for me, and carried her to a capital inn, where a stage-coach was then preparing to set out (as at this season it travels all the night) I paid her fare, and saw her put safely into the coach—giving her a small sum to defray her charges on the road.—I saw the coach set off.—She wrung my hand at parting.—“May heaven (said she with tears) shew you, and your sweet babe, that *mercy* you have shewn to me.”

I claim no merit, my Lucy, on this occasion:—I only hope I have been an humble instrument of *saving* this poor wretch from perishing in the streets;

streets ; — which must undoubtedly have been her fate, if I had not lent her some little assistance. — Some wives may perhaps blame me on this occasion, and exclaim, “ What a tame, easy fool, is this Mrs. Benson ! — I would sooner have torn the eyes of the impudent hussy out of her head, than have assisted her with money to carry her to her friends ! ” — No matter for the censure of these *outrageously virtuous* ladies : — I feel I have done right : — I feel I have rescued, from the lowest abyss of perdition, a *fellow-creature* : and I am convinced, did our sex *endeavour* to save, by *mildness*, those young, helpless creatures, on their *first* lapse, (for afterwards I have done with them) our streets, nor the shocking receptacles for vice in this great city, would not be filled as they are, with such numbers of miserable objects, who, after their first offence, are fearful of returning to their friends ;

friends; and consequently, actuated by desperation, throw themselves on the town, and are soon the early victims of disease, famine, and death.—But to return to my own story.

I found my husband safely arrived at our lodgings, and I told him in what manner I had provided for the young woman.—I pass over the encomiums he made me on this occasion, and the solemn assurances of his being a convert to virtue. But alas! my dear, I believe him not:—a confirm'd libertine is habitually bad.—Nothing in the whole tenor of his conduct is to be relied on.—It is true, for this last fortnight (for it is so long since the above incident happen'd) my husband has behaved very decently, and with much *seeming* affection to me:—but, alas! my dear, vice *may*, and indeed must *admire virtue*, but can never *love*, or *associate* with it long: it sees in *virtue* its own deformity, and therefore

fore will *avoid* it, in order to seek its low gratifications in vices of the same stamp. Well says the poet on this subject,

“ For lust, though to a radiant angel join’d,
“ Would leave its high abode, its blissful state,
“ To prey on *garbage*.”

* * * * *

Saturday.

Before I close this enormously long epistle, I must tell you that I was yesterday much affected with the following *artless*, honest effusions of gratitude, (in a letter accompanied with a present) from the parents of the poor penitent Peggy. The contents of this grateful letter were as follows.

Madam Benson,

With hearts overflowing with gratitude for your kind care of our poor Peggy, we, the under-written, set pen to paper.—The blessings of all
goodness

goodness fall upon you, for your saving our deluded child from further ruin.—We did not know his honour was a married man, or he never should have shadowed our door. Peggy has seen her error—your goodness struck her, she says, to the heart, with shame and repentance.—It would grieve you, Madam, to see how the poor thing cries, and takes on.—She will not eat—but, I thank God, none of the neighbours knew of our shame;—that is some comfort, however.—I hope his honour will be good to such a sweet gentlewoman as (Peggy says) you are.——To be sure it is a wicked world, but as we have got our poor child again, we must try to forget what cannot be help'd.—When she came back, my dame and I both cried over her for an hour together.—Never shall she go out of our sight again, till we see her honestly *married*.—And so, Madam, wishing you all worldly blessings,

blessings, we remain your most humble and dutiful

Servants till death,
John and Joan Pimrose.

Cherry-Hill Farm.

P. S. My dame is very sorry she have no turkey to send you for a present; but the foxes have carried off the last brood. She have sent you, good Madam, a cheese of her own making; and I have sent a dozen bottles of perry, made of pears from our own orchard, and a sack of golden-pippins.—Peggy would send her duty, but she says she is *asham'd*.—Excuse my bad writing.

Mrs. Benson in continuation.

Poor, grateful folks! I wept over their artless letter.—You see there is still some *honesty* and *goodness* in this bad world.—But it is time to release you. Adieu, adieu,

most affectionately,
your's F. B.

L E T T E R XXXIV.

Fleet Prison.

My dear Friend.

EIGHT months,—a dreadful interval!—have past, since I wrote last.—A chain of melancholy incidents hath at length reduced your poor lost Fanny, to the miserable asylum of a prison, from whence you see this is dated.—The wicked man, whom I so rashly married, at length (six months since) has openly shew'd himself the *villain*, and having strip'd me of every thing, is gone off to France, with the abandon'd wife of one of his libertine friends, and left me to encounter all the horrors of a jail.—Have I a more trying calamity to relate?—Alas! I have not yet told you, a fever has carried my sweet little Lucy to her grave!—The measure of my woes is now indeed full.—Heaven's will be done.—Yes, my friend,

friend, I am now arrived at that patient resignation, which I am convinced can only be learnt in the bitter school of adversity.—It is *there*—and *there* only, we are taught to *know* ourselves, and to learn an absolute submission to the will of *high heaven*.

No more, sweet babe, will thy heart-endearing smiles fill with joy the languid soul of thy wretched mother.—But why should I lament that my little one is crowned with *victory*, before the thunder roared, before the lightning pour'd its rage?—The Almighty Disposer of events hath hous'd this little tender flower, before she was capable of tasting calamity.—He saw, no doubt, some impending evil,—and, in *kindness*, took her to himself.—I bear the loss in silence and in resignation.—Lucy, I am calm—I weep not—indeed I am compos'd.—What has God taken from me, but his *own*? Let me then submit with
VOL. II. N patience,

patience, and only say, *Thy will be done.*

A period, at last, my friend, will be put to my sufferings,—and all beyond, I trust, will be peace and happiness.—Patience and resignation will give me strength to endure,—and a farther conformity to the will of our heavenly Disposer, will turn all my bitterness into delight.—These *afflictions have* been, and *are*, I trust, working out for me an eternal portion of glory, when the heaving sigh, the gushing tear, will be chang'd into songs of joy, and hymns of everlasting praise and wonder.

O how sweet is it, my friend, to perish with a patience that is *pleas'd*, instead of struggling with the Almighty! Let me then humbly kiss the rod, and bow in obedience to his will.—I would rather pine in dungeons, and famish from day to day, in a resignation to the disposal of my
Creator,

Creator, than enjoy affluence with corroding guilt. I hold it incumbent to bear the present calamities of mortality with content and thankfulness, as a matter previously necessary to our future sublimation. If we consider whatever *evil* at present intermingles with the *good*, it may be well accounted for, by the consideration that our everlasting happiness is working by progression. I am convinced that misfortunes are sent to teach us the *fallacy* and *danger* of earthly *attachments*, and to excite us to place our hopes, and our whole dependance on HIM, who cannot deceive.

But I must hasten to give the friend of my heart some account of the circumstance which brought me in the end to this place.

For a few weeks after my last letter to you (now eight months since) Mr. Benson behav'd with much *seem-*

ing affection to me, but he was often absent whole days; and when he spent his evenings abroad, which he very frequently did, seldom return'd home till a very late hour.—I bore all with patience, and never ask'd any questions. I applied myself, night and day, to my pen, the earnings of which was our only, but very precarious, support. About that time I was one evening (when I was sitting alone, ruminating on our miserable situation) very agreeably surpris'd with a letter from Miss Edwards, a lady I have before mention'd to you. She told me she was going to the south of France with her father, for his health; and very delicately hinted, that she heard I had met with misfortunes, therefore beg'd me to accept of the enclosed fifty pound bank bill.—This kind and generous friend, in the postscript to her affectionate letter, told me to keep this little sum (as
she

she call'd it) for *my own use*, against a calamitous day. But indeed, my dear friend, *prudent* as this advice was, I could not, in my heart, know I was in the actual possession of such a sum, and not let my husband share it with me. This noble present came in good time, as we had not a guinea in the world; and ow'd our landlady above a twelvemonth's rent. The next morning, as I thought it my *duty* like a good wife so to do, I inform'd Mr. Benson of this pleasing, and indeed noble present. He express'd great satisfaction: I put it into a drawer, by his direction, in a bureau in our chamber, "for there," said he, "it will be safe." At the same time adding, that he was oblig'd to dine out, and to spend the evening abroad with some friends, who had promis'd to get him a place in the customs.

I was inly happy the whole day,

in thinking, by the bank-bill, that our house-rent would now be paid, and I applied myself, with great assiduity, to my pen that whole day. My husband return'd and came to bed at his usual late hour.—I heard him rising the next morning very early.—As I was extremely sleepy, I just ask'd him what it was that made him leave his bed so soon?

“ Don't let me disturb you, my dear love, (said he) I am only looking for my gloves, in the bureau, (softly opening the drawer) go to sleep—don't trouble yourself about me,—I shall be back by dinner.—“ Heaven bless you, my angel,” said the vile dissembler, and softly shutting the door of the chamber after him, departed.

I betook myself again to rest, and wak'd not till my sweet little Lucy, who slept with me, began her usual playfulness.—When I had dress'd her
and

and myself, I rang for the maid of the house, to bring my breakfast,—and told her what I would have for dinner. “Mr. Benson,” added I, “will be back by two o’clock.”

“Surely it is impossible,” said the girl, “they can be back so soon.”

As I imagined she mistook in saying *they*, I took no further notice of the expression:—but what was my astonishment, when, as I was sitting at breakfast, with my little darling by my side, the mistress of the house, came into the room, and told me, “she was sorry she had been so long *deceiv’d*;—that she stood upon the character of her house;—and that she had daughters grown up.”

“Mrs. Turner,” said I, “to what purpose can these observations of your’s tend?—pray speak to be understood.”

She then gave me the horrid intelligence (gracious Heaven, do I

live to write it ?) that Mr. Benson was set out for France with a lady she mention'd ;—and that he had acknowledged I was not his wife, but a woman he had kept for his pleasures, and that he had left money in my hands to pay the rent of our lodgings.

What farther this woman said, I know not ;—I fell into fainting fits, in which I remain'd some hours.—The horrid perfidy of my abandon'd husband, when I came out of my fainting, was like a dagger plung'd in my breast.—I however stagger'd to my bureau for my bank note, given by Miss Edwards ; but finding it gone, and that the vilest of men had basely taken it with him, the horrors of my deplorable situation may be better felt than describ'd.—Mr. Turner, who was a hard, worldly man, shortly grew outrageous for his money, which in all was above twenty pounds,

pounds, as we had dealt at his shop for fundry articles.

“ Come—come, my fine Madam,” said this merciless *money-getting* man, “ here you shall stay no longer.”—He grew abusive, and then left me. The next day I was arrested for the money, notwithstanding I pleaded that I was the lawful *wife* of Mr. Benson.—After I had implor’d the assistance of Heaven, I took my little smiling Lucy in my arms, and was thrust into a coach, which convey’d me to the officer’s house, and the same day, for want of bail, I was conducted to prison.

Astonishing as it may appear to you, my friend, for the first week of my abode in this wretched habitation, I was calm—I was compos’d.—I deriv’d great comfort from my devotions:—my bible, and my child, were an inexhaustible fund of inward delight. By the first, I was *strengthen’d*

by faith to endure: by the sweet smiles of the latter, my heart was *gladden'd* with a mother's fond delight: but of this comfort of my child, it pleas'd Heaven soon to deprive me.—What means this falling tear?—can I weep for an angel?

I have now been in a kind of gradual decline, attended by a low fever, for several months.—I ardently wish for my release from a world of sorrow, pain, and disappointment.—I have now one only wish remaining—that you, my Lucy, may close my eyes,—and that I may sigh my last breath in your faithful bosom.—But I grow faint.—Adieu—adieu—
my inexpressibly dear friend,

FRANCES BENS N.

CON-

C O N C L U S I O N,

B Y T H E E D I T O R.

I Arriv'd in England soon after my unhappy friend wrote her last letter, which fortunately came, before it was shipp'd, to my hands, a few days after it was sent to the India-House; by which means I learnt, to my inexpressible grief, the wretched abode of the above dear and excellent woman.—I flew to her assistance,—but found her in a situation which pierced my soul.—She was laid on a wretched bed,—and appear'd, by her emaciated figure, to be in the very last stage of a deep consumption.—She was then in a sweet sleep:—I stood for some moments gazing on this beloved, hapless friend, in grief unspeakable.—The happy hours, in early youth, we
had

had so often enjoy'd—her charming form, when I last beheld her,—the sprightly wit,—the nameless graces which then adorn'd her,—all rush'd on my remembrance, and harrow'd up my soul, when I reflected on the miseries she must have sustain'd, to be reduced to the sad state in which I now beheld her.—Whilst I was contemplating the sad reverse, she awoke:—but, alas, she knew me not:—her poor brain was gone!—I kneel'd by her;—I took her hand, and kissing her cold cheek, “Fanny, (said I) your Lucy is return'd to England:—she brings you life, and joy, and happiness.—Look up, my love—have you forgot your Lucy?”

She fix'd her *dim eyes* upon me with such a vacant *stare*, and without the least remembrance, or knowledge of my person, as shock'd my very soul.—I rais'd her in my arms, and gave her a few drops of a powerful
cordial

cordial I had brought with me.—She again survey'd me, without the least trace of memory, and in broken accents, faintly said,—“ You are a good lady, I doubt not.—Pray, Madam, have you a *husband*? I once—do my good lady, help me to recollect the story of my misfortunes.—Had I not once a child? I call'd her I think—I think I call'd her my little Lucy.”

Here she dropp'd in a slumber in my arms.—I fear'd my sobs and weeping would disturb her—but she slept a considerable time; and on awaking, beheld me with great earnestness, when faintly exclaiming, “ Ah, my friend! my Lucy!—Heaven I thank thee!”—and gently laying her head on my bosom, expir'd without a groan.

Ye daughters of ease and affluence,
—you who are bless'd with riches,
and with the power of wiping away
the

the tear from the languid cheek of poverty,—O make the compassionate trial:—visit these melancholy receptacles, where, shut out from the common benefits of life, so many of our fellow-creatures are, at this moment, dragging on, from day to day, a wretched being;—pining in sickness,—and a prey to famine. The insolvent debtor is, perhaps, of all objects, most pitiable.—Let your susceptible hearts be touch'd with compassion, at least for your *own* sex, who, many of them, from unavoidable *misfortunes*, are at once *innocent*, yet *wretched*.

May the fate of the unfortunate virtuous woman, whose life I present to the public, be a warning to all, how they *misapply* their *time* and *talents*;—or how they too *precipitately* enter the *married state*.—I could here make many very moral and serious reflections, but I will omit them,
for

for the same reason that a late very ingenious author does; and that is, " I think it a compliment due to the judgment of my readers, to leave them to make reflections for themselves."

F I N I S.

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